



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School

**High School 227
240 East 172 Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Talana Bradley

Dates of review: April 28 – 29, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Marilyn Lehmann

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School is a high school with 377 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 35.1% Black, 61.4% Hispanic, 1.3% White, and 0.6% Asian students. The student body includes 16.4% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 79.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 81% eligibility.

As an expeditionary learning school Bronx Expeditionary High espouses an approach to learning and teaching which incorporates active pedagogy. Project-based learning is focused around topics derived from content standards. The school shares the building with five other high schools. This provides opportunities for collaboration between the schools but also presents challenges in the management of behaviour and the scheduling of access to facilities that are used in common.

The school is in its fourth year. This is a transition year for the school. It is the first year with a graduation cohort. In addition the principal, who has been in post for three years, is leaving at the end of the year to start a new school and the school is in the process of appointing a new principal.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and administration have a good understanding of what is needed for further improvement as well as of the school's strengths.
- There is a reflective learning environment which supports teachers' professional development well.
- Students are encouraged to take responsibility for setting personal goals and taking the steps to achieve these.
- The school uses a range of effective strategies to ensure that students are well supported and cared for.
- The school provides a safe environment where staff and students treat one another with mutual respect.
- The school is a small, close-knit community so every student is well-known to members of staff.
- The school provides considerable and effective support for new teachers.
- The school's partnerships with outside organizations provide very effective support for students' social, personal and academic development.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop good practices by formalizing systems and structures and providing models of excellence for teachers to use.
- Widen the curriculum to give all students greater access to the arts.
- Further develop teachers' use of data so that it becomes an integral part of teachers' everyday practice.
- Develop strategies to convey consistently high expectations, including use of classroom display of students' work to demonstrate and celebrate high standards.
- Build on work to develop the differentiation of instruction and active pedagogy to increase student engagement in their learning and to improve their progress.
- Develop, integrate and consistently implement structures for setting explicit, measurable interim and long-term goals that will promote and support further improvement.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School is a small school which provides a safe and supportive learning environment. A wide range of data is generated and collected and the school has a good overall understanding of students' performance and progress. However, not all teachers are equally competent in their use of technology to manipulate data or in the application of data analysis to everyday practice. The school has addressed all the areas for improvement identified in the last Quality Review. A whole-school grading policy is being implemented, and attendance is improving as a result of more rigorous attendance strategies. In other areas, initiatives such as faculty learning targets have been introduced and are in the process of becoming fully integrated into the school's practice.

Administration and members of staff work collaboratively to set goals for improvement, although parents and students are not necessarily fully aware of the school's goals as they are not involved in this process. However, the school seeks to involve students in setting their own personal goals for improvement and identifying their next steps. It also works hard to involve parents in supporting their children's learning. The school has expectations that students will achieve well, but these not always made explicit.

The curriculum has been mapped and the school is developing inter-disciplinary links. The scheduling of double-period sessions for some subjects, however, means there is limited time available for students to participate in arts activities. Some teachers make good use of data and teacher assessment outcomes to adjust their teaching, but this is not consistent across the school and effective differentiation remains an area for further development. The school also uses data from periodic assessments to inform planning and modify targets, but time frames for identified actions and interim benchmarks against which to measure progress are not made explicit.

Professional development remains a priority as the school has had new teachers every year. New teachers are well supported and all teachers have access to a range of professional development opportunities. However, there are no consistent procedures for arranging inter-visitations or formal sharing of good practices.

The inquiry team identified social studies as the research focus area. Strategies are being implemented to improve the Regents results, and if these prove effective the school intends to extend these strategies to other subject areas.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects a range of data, including through ARIS, HSST and ATS as well as the outcomes of classroom assessment, mock Regents and Regents tests. This is regularly used to inform understanding of student progress. The school is also developing the use of student portfolios as a further source of information. The progress and needs of special education students and English language learners are reviewed at weekly meetings. The school leaders also disaggregate data, especially the information about each new cohort, by gender and ethnicity and results are shared with members of staff. The school is developing an online data archive so that members of staff can easily access the information. The school administration compares student performance against previous outcomes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs. It also measures its performance against that of similar schools including two of the schools on the shared campus. As a result, the school has a sound understanding of the performance and progress of the school as well as of its students.

Systems and structures are in place to develop teachers' skills in manipulating and analyzing data. However teachers are not all equally skilled or confident so the use of data to inform instructional planning and track student progress is not yet consistently effective.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Members of staff meet together as a whole school as well as in regular meetings at grade and department level to review progress and set goals for further development. Teachers are encouraged to set their own goals for improvement. Faculty learning targets have been introduced and provide a supportive structure for teachers to take responsibility for increasing their expertise. Similarly, students set their own learning goals and review progress towards meeting these at student-led conferences held with their teacher and parents. This contributes to each student's understanding of their strengths and areas for further development and underlines the school's expectations that students take responsibility for their learning. Careful attention is given to special education students and English language learners. Special education teachers are becoming subject specialists in order to provide more focused subject support.

The principal and her senior staff have high expectations for the students and frequently articulate them. However, not all students and parents share these because the school does not have a range of strategies to consistently convey them to all members of the school community in a tangible way. Not all classrooms provide a stimulating learning environment and there are few examples of student work being displayed in classrooms to demonstrate high standards and celebrate student achievement.

The school works hard to involve parents in supporting their children's learning. Parents appreciate the school's efforts to keep them informed through letters and phone calls as well as at the student-led conferences. They feel that the school welcomes and values their views.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's curriculum is being developed within the context of expeditionary learning. All students enjoy opportunities to study a topic in depth during a week-long "intensive". Attention is paid to meeting identified needs. Double-period programming in English language arts, math, science and social studies was introduced to improve student progress in response to data evidence that students were not making equally good progress in all subject areas. However, this means that there is not time for students to participate in arts programs.

Teachers use data, especially teacher assessment information, to inform their planning and instruction. The school places an emphasis on developing active pedagogy and effective differentiation of instruction. As yet not all the teachers are skilled in differentiating instruction to address different learning styles and meet students' different needs. As a result students are not always actively engaged in their learning or enabled to make the best possible progress.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are based on analysis of data. The decision to introduce double-period programming was made in response to analysis of student progress data. Similarly a self-contained class was introduced in grade 9 to meet identified need.

Students feel safe and well-supported in the school and staff and students treat one another with respect. Because this is a small school, members of staff know the students personally, with every student being very well known by at least one teacher. Students commented that they liked the "community-like feeling" of the school. As one student explained, "Teachers are interested in students beyond just their grades."

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and assistant principals frequently observe classroom teaching, both formally and informally, and provide supportive feedback. Outcomes of these observations, responses from teacher surveys and analysis of student data inform decisions on professional development. The development of skills specific to expeditionary learning are also taken into account. The school encourages teachers to reflect on their practice and to set targets for further development. Faculty learning targets provide a strong structure for teacher reflection and growth, although full implementation has yet to be formalized and completely followed through.

Teachers meet regularly in grade or subject teams to plan and share ideas and strategies. They also benefit from carefully planned whole-school professional development as well as specific focused sessions such as those provided by the AUSSIE math consultant. There is an effective formal induction program for new teachers. In addition new teachers feel strongly supported by colleagues and senior staff. Teachers sometimes visit one another's classrooms or other schools, but intervisitations are not formally scheduled and there are few opportunities to observe existing good practices or model lessons.

The school functions quietly and effectively. Systems and procedures, including communications, are being further developed to meet the needs of the enlarged school. Students generally behave well because discipline procedures are clear and consistently implemented. The school has introduced the responsible thinking process to further support effective behavior management. It has set up a responsible thinking classroom for grade 9 students, and is monitoring the impact on student behavior with a view to extending the program to grades 10 and 11.

Students' personal, social and academic progress is considerably enhanced by enrichment opportunities resulting from the school's partnerships with outside organizations, including Outward Bound, Hostos Community College and CUNY. These enable students to participate in wilderness residential programs and other trips, community service projects and internships as well as in college courses.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and her assistant principals have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and share a vision for its continuing improvement. Some goals for further development, such as those exemplified by the faculty learning targets, are clearly articulated. However, not all long-term goals are made explicit and the school does not consistently set and measure its progress against interim time-framed benchmarks. As a result, the school cannot easily measure its overall effectiveness.

Teachers use periodic assessments, including predictive assessments, mock Regents and Regents to evaluate students' progress and adjust instructional plans to meet identified needs. Strategies to improve student achievement in social studies, for instance, were modified in response to assessment outcomes. Because it is small, the school can be flexible in its planning and uses assessment information to quickly revise plans, including providing specific programs for individual students. Review of assessment outcomes, particularly at the May review, during the summer reflection and at the mid-term "huddle", informs each phase of goal setting. The data is used to inform strategic decisions including adjusting the curriculum, revising scheduling or, as this year, re-forming some classes to make them more homogenous. The focus is always on improving student progress and enabling each student to achieve as highly as possible.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?		X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?		X			
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?		X			
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?		X			
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?		X			
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X			
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?			X		
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?			X		
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?			X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?		X			
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?			X		
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?			X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?			X		
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X		

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X		

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped