



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Bronx High School for Writing and Communication
Arts**

**High School 253
800 East Gun Hill Road
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Steven Chernigoff

Dates of review: October 16, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee

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

Progress made since the last review

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

Bronx High School for Writing and Communication Arts is a high school with 444 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 53% Black, 45% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 38% of the students enrolled and girls account for 62%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 87.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 76% eligibility.

The school is accommodated in the same building as several other high schools offering a range of different specialisms. Since the last Quality Review, the school has enrolled a further 100 students, and now has grade 12 students. There has been a corresponding expansion in the number of staff.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students and parents recognize that this school has high expectations that students will achieve as much as possible.
- The exchange of information between home and school is very effective.
- The school's curriculum successfully promotes students' core skills, especially literacy.
- The principal is skilful and creative in the way in which he manages and organizes the school's budget, staffing and schedules.
- There is a very positive climate for learning in which all members of the school community treat one another with respect.
- The school has secured and maintained good attendance, with little tardiness.
- Teachers, who are new to the profession or new to the school, receive good support to help them settle in quickly.
- There is a wide range of effective partnerships, which strongly promote students' academic and social progress.
- Teachers receive helpful feedback on their performance so that they improve their instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Generate and utilize information about the progress of different ethnic and gender groups.
- Ensure that all teachers have the necessary training and support to help them utilize data more effectively when planning instruction.
- Continue to develop teachers' skills in differentiating instruction in order to meet the varying needs of different students more effectively.
- Provide further opportunities for teachers to share good practice, especially through peer observations.

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.

The school has faced a difficult period over the last few years. The administration has had to set up and rapidly expand a small school within a short period. During this time, the school has continued to maintain the quality of the provision for its students, particularly in its specialist area of writing and communication, with the good support of its lead partners. The principal has sustained a safe and positive climate for learning that is much appreciated by parents and students alike. Instruction is becoming increasingly effective and the new staff team provides a well-rounded education to the students. There is further work to be done on meeting the professional development needs of teachers, and in becoming more adept at the use of whole school data. The school has set up its inquiry team, which has met four times. The school has addressed most of the issues from the last Quality Review, although differentiation remains an area for development.

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 tracks effectively the performance of individual students and analyzes its data to check how well classes and grades are performing. The school is not yet fully effective in analyzing and utilizing data relating to the progress made by different gender or ethnic groups.

Teachers have a good understanding of the performance made by individual students. One parent said, "They know your child, and they know you." Students' progress is tracked during regular discussions with teachers and advisors. Teachers assess performance formally three times each semester, so that there is a constant updating of achievement information about each student. Teachers meet together as a grade, and diligently compare the performance of the students in each class. There are further case conferences where teachers get together to discuss in greater detail those students who are causing concern either academically or socially.

The focus on the individual has good benefits for those students who require extra support, such as special education students and English language learners. For these students, the specialist staff meet together periodically to review individual education plans, and to assess how much progress each student is making. This close analysis results in effective, custom-made strategies for improvement.

The school is beginning to make comparisons between its own performance and that of similar small schools, particularly those occupying the same building. The school has information at its disposal on the relative progress of the different groups and of boys and girls. It also has evidence that some groups do better than others. However, it does not yet make full use of the information it has, for example by modifying instructional strategies. Not all teachers are confident in the use of data to inform instruction, but training is ongoing..

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 well developed.

The school is effective in helping students to set their own challenging, individual goals, and it sets whole-school goals that have clear measurable success criteria. Goals are also set for subjects and grades. The school has a good system that enables students to gain an understanding of how much progress they have made and set their own goals for future achievement. This flexible system responds well to the different needs of individual students and their families. A parent said, “The teachers push them to do the best. They don’t just settle for anything.”

Students meet with their teachers or advisors frequently, and families are kept very well informed through a variety of means. There is a formal report once every six weeks and teachers regularly email and telephone the families. One parent said, “That phone call means a lot to me. It shows they care. And if they care, the student cares.” The administration and faculty make themselves available to meet with students and their families through the day. Guidance counselors hold formal and informal conferences as necessary. The parent coordinator does a good job in providing general information and arranging events and meetings that help bring the school and home together.

Specialist staff, working with special education students, hold frequent reviews of students’ progress towards the goals set in individual education plans. They and the students check whether students have reached their targets and re-set the goals so they meet ever-increasing challenges.

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 specialism in writing and communication means that students receive many opportunities to make good progress in literacy. All teachers work to make lessons interesting, but some are less skilled than others in matching instruction to the different needs of students in the class.

The school’s partnerships have added breadth and interest to the curriculum. A very strong partnership with a theater company provides funding, expertise and opportunities for students to develop their skills in writing, editing and acting. A further strong

partnership with a prominent publishing company gives students the chance to undertake real workplace experience in editing, proofreading and publishing their own work.

Other areas of the curriculum are not as well developed, mainly because the resources and accommodation available to the school have not kept pace with the rapid increase in student and staff numbers. The science lab is not yet open, which limits the hands-on work which students are able to undertake. The school has a limited number of laptops available to the students, despite the school's specialism in writing.

Parents and students say that they would like the school to expand the curriculum further, and for there to be more in the way of honors classes, foreign languages, music and dance. One parent said, "I'd like my boy to have a foreign language, so he could be ahead of the curve."

Teachers have good, respectful relationships with the students. The students attend well, work hard in their classes, and there is very little misbehavior. One student said, "All the kids want to learn, so they show respect to the teachers." Students and parents say that this is because of the small classes, where teachers have the time to spend with each student. Relationships between students are very good too. Another student said, "We bring each other up, and we rub off on one another. There is very little bullying at all in the school, maybe just a little gossip."

The principal has managed the rapid increase in staff well, and has been very creative in getting the best out of the resources at his disposal. He works tirelessly to try to keep teaching and learning up to a high standard.

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 pace of change has been substantial, and the principal has succeeded in making sure that the school continues to provide a safe, student-centered and positive learning environment. The administration has a good understanding of the quality of teachers' performance. This understanding is reached through regular formal and informal observations, as well as by frequent walkthroughs. Teachers say that these work well, although they would appreciate a more detailed discussion prior to the observations. Teachers would also like to have the opportunity to share each other's good practice through peer observations and critiques. These are currently limited by the scheduling arrangements. The outcomes from the evaluations of teachers' and students' performance provide the basis for professional development activities. These enable teachers to become increasingly skilful in planning instruction.

Teachers new to the profession and new to the school receive very good support, which enables them to 'hit the ground running'. They are especially appreciative of the way in which their more experienced colleagues rally round, offering advice and guidance. There is evident camaraderie and a strong team spirit within the teaching staff. In their discussions, they demonstrate their commitment to the students and their awareness of the pressures faced by the school and its administration in this difficult period of expansion and change.

The school's partnerships are a very strong feature of the school. Aside from its lead partners, the school is establishing mutually beneficial arrangements with the other high schools within the building, and with academic institutions such as Hunter College.

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 school makes good use of monitoring at the level of the individual student. It tracks and monitors whole school performance against measurable targets, although these do not yet include goals that are set for the different groups within the school. This means that teachers do not know as much as they might about the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

Teachers are effective both in keeping check on how well students are performing, and in ensuring that the subsequent goals are sufficiently challenging. A strong feature of this system is the way in which students themselves are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by making decisions about their own goals. This encourages them to develop quickly as independent learners.

Staff who work with special education students or with English language learners monitor progress closely and make adjustments as necessary in order to maximize achievement. Specialist staff, such as counselors and social workers, contribute well to this process.

The principal has brought the staff, students and parents together well around a shared set of community values. All the community justifiably recognizes that he has held the school together well during a period of change. In certain areas and at certain times, it has been difficult to communicate all aspects of the 'big picture', particularly to teachers. However, the faculty has a good understanding of the reasons for this. Staff are prepared to go the extra mile to demonstrate their support for the school, administration and students.

The school's development planning includes interim and final goals that have tight success criteria so they can easily measure progress towards goals. However, insufficient attention is paid to monitoring the relative achievement of the ethnic and gender groups within the school, so that the information in the system is not as detailed as it could be.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx High School for Writing and Communication Arts	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 demanding, 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?				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?			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		