



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists

Middle School 269

1180 Tinton Avenue

Bronx

NY 10456

Principal: David Vazquez

Dates of review: May 21 - 22, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Althea Serrant

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists is a middle school with 208 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 35% Black and 65% Hispanic students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 90.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 88% eligibility.

The principal is eagerly awaiting the completion of the new building so that the school may expand to grade 12.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is an exceptional leader and a highly skilled administrator whose passion and dedication provide inspiration to all.
- Faculty team members are highly effective in providing focused support for special education students and the English language learners.
- Professional development provides highly effective differentiated support for teachers with a focus on their identified professional needs.
- The extensive arts curriculum provides enrichment and engagement in student learning.
- The school's orderly environment creates a safe learning environment and displays celebrating student work reflect the school's high expectations.
- Parents have very positive praise for the high quality of education and personalized care their children receive.
- The school-activist family contract is having a significant impact in creating a cohesive, unified learning atmosphere.
- The school used various data systems effectively to monitor the progress of achievement of students.
- School programming and systems facilitate planning time for teachers to use data to plan instruction.
- There is an environment of mutual trust among administrators, students, and parents to support academic development.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish measurable long-term and interim goals and review them regularly to monitor the school's progress.
- Develop teachers' practice to provide more challenging activities for higher achieving students consistently across all classes.
- Use data more effectively to monitor regularly the progress of the different ethnic groups and other groups of students.

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 well developed.

The principal has inspired the staff to work in a cohesive manner to make changes in their instruction and their understanding of data, both of which have led to a rise in achievement. Parents are informed regularly during the year about their child's achievement and progress and this is a driving force in personalizing the student's education. The advisory program with its individual student goals reinforces the school's high expectations for all the students. Goals are set with the students and advisors and parents receive regular information about their children's progress.

The school's data system provides a benchmark for all the school's team meetings that are held on a weekly basis. The school makes good use of this data at individual student level but does not place enough emphasis on identifying potential underachievement among different groups of students. Staff plan collaboratively and much instruction is differentiated to match learners' needs, although high-achieving students are not always provided with sufficient challenge. Two staff developers were hired to focus on intervention strategies for the English language learners and the special education students and, as a result, the students' performance improved in literacy and math.

High-quality professional development programs provide new and experienced teachers with the opportunity to develop their skills. The community-based organizations provide additional support to help struggling students during the school day and in after-school sessions. The administrators provide high-quality leadership and management in the school. They have created a climate of mutual trust in which staff and students are confident in working together to improve the school. The school does not at present have measurable or long-term interim goals to enable it to review its progress or to guide the rigorous evaluation of the students' progress throughout the year.

Since the last Quality Review, the school has made good progress in comparing the performance of different groups of students with past performance to show improvement. More limited progress has been made in monitoring the performance of different groups, for example ethnic groups, and in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students. Here, most able students are not always as challenged as they should be. The inquiry team focused on students with lower scores on the standardized test from the previous school year. The students were placed in smaller cohorts for instruction and their advisors met regularly with the students to ensure that they were receiving the appropriate intervention. Parents were sent regular interim reports to keep them abreast of the students' progress.

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 well developed.

The schools' system of regular cycles of reporting to parents is highly effective in tracking student progress. Baseline assessments are administered at the beginning of each year in each grade and then the data is used to set the benchmark goals for the year. Teacher assessments, homework performance, and attendance are used to monitor the progress of each student. As a result, the school has a good understanding of the achievement and progress of all its students. Special education students and the English language learners make good progress as a result of the academic intervention provided by the newly hired special education teacher. Special education students are mainstreamed with general education students once the analysis of their assessment data supports the need for more challenging work. Push-in and pull-out programs provide effective differentiated instruction for the English language learners and special education students. The school uses data well to identify successful schools and arrange visits to share best practices. The school knows how well different groups of students are doing. However, it does not yet use data effectively to monitor the progress of different ethnic and other groups by disaggregating the data. This means it is not able to identifying the strategies that will help to improve the students' learning where one group is falling behind others.

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 has very good systems in place to use assessment data to formulate student goals for improving their performance. Advisors then meet with the students to outline action plans based on this information. The students then write their own goals with guidance from their advisors. The principal and the teachers discuss assessment data and student progress to ensure that the goals are helping the students meet the desired goals. Students and teachers shared that this is a productive manner to help with the continuous goal setting at all levels in the school. This approach does not yet extend to setting whole-school goals.

The school has developed good strategies for supporting students with the greatest needs. These students do not always engage fully with the process of setting more rigorous measurable goals, and the school is aware of the need to develop activities that challenge the students to do this. The staff developer has received professional development training on intervention strategies. She has now trained other staff in these strategies to improve the literacy skills of the struggling. Academic intervention teachers provide good support to the struggling students in each classroom. They work collaboratively and successfully with the classroom teachers to provide the support based on the results of the data. The school is also successful in providing support to the struggling students in its after-school and tutorial programs. Parents are extremely pleased with the personalized care their children receive from the staff and wish that the high school component were in place already. Parents receive a progress report every six weeks and value the individual appointments that are made to meet with the teacher to

discuss next steps. They also value the telephone calls they receive each day if their child is late or absent. The school's advisors have high expectations for students which are shared with parents and encourage students to transfer to the best high schools. The school's rigor and high expectations were noted in students' class work and homework assignments.

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 well developed.

The curriculum is constantly revised based on assessment data. The focus this year is to select leveled libraries that are interdisciplinary and build on the students' ability to think critically. The school provides a range of arts opportunities within the curriculum. The roundtable activities are an interdisciplinary problem-solving project that all students are required to participate in at the end of the year. The project encourages the students to think more deeply about their work, this has had a positive impact on student progress. Observation of a few students presenting their roundtable activity and being questioned by their peers and teachers revealed that students had developed considerable confidence.

Teachers have visited peer schools to identify successful instructional strategies and have implemented many of these well in their classes, particularly in English language arts and math. These visits have also helped the teachers to motivate the students to read more books in and out of school. Teachers meet weekly to review students' assessment results and prepare plans for instruction. The staff developer plans with the teachers to ensure consistency of approach. She uses feedback from regular visits to classes to help teachers provide differentiated instruction. Teachers have been differentiating activities based on the various data streams. However, the methods they use vary from class to class and do not have sufficient focus on instruction for higher-attaining students. Teachers have not yet benefited from visiting other classes to share best practices and develop a consistent model of differentiation for the school.

Students and teachers are very respectful to each other as they constantly refer to the school-activist family contract posted in all classrooms. The contract explicitly outlines the school's behavioral and attendance goals, such as 95% attendance and the consequences for breaking the school and class rules. The contract also encourages all students to be successful by implementing expected academic class work and homework routines. The school has worked successfully to ensure above average attendance.

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 well developed.

A steering committee comprised of the principal, assistant principal, and the staff developer conduct walkthroughs and observations on a regular basis. Each walkthrough has a specific learning focus that is used to provide feedback to the teachers and to inform next steps for professional development. The principal is involved in the planning sessions for the professional development. The data from the walkthroughs and formal and informal observations is used to inform the professional development topics and

instruction. The school has a strong emphasis, in many of the goal-setting meetings with the school's steering committee, on literacy and math skills.

The steering committee observed that the rubrics for the annual roundtable end of year project over the past few years were not sufficiently challenging. A small group then analyzed the data, reviewed the standards, looked at student work and improved the rubrics. The mathematics content area team members build on each other's expertise well by visiting and observing lessons.

All students have an advisor who ensures that they receive academic and personal support. Each advisor has only ten students. The advisor guides the students in the selection of programs such as the arts, sports, international student ambassador program, and/or tutorial programs. The school has developed a range of partnerships that benefit student learning. One project supports the science curriculum through outdoor and environmental work and another supports student music through a trained conductor leading choral singing. A highlight of the school's enrichment programs is the trip to Europe for the students who exemplify appropriate behaviour. The students are very respectful and well behaved because of the clear expectations of the principal.

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 monitors student progress six times per year to celebrate students' successes and identify those whose work needs improvement. The data that is consistently used includes student artifacts, standardized test results and homework assessments as tools to monitor student progress. This helps the teachers identify the students learning and social needs. The information results in a change in strategies and purchasing of additional materials. The steering committee, which includes the principal, reviews all the data to monitor the whole process. This committee ensures that there is consistency in all departments. The steering committee then involves the whole staff in revisiting and rewriting the curriculum. Based on these meetings student goals are set with the teachers who in turn set goals with the students. The goals do not have specific time frames for accomplishment, however, and the targets are not therefore challenging or rigorous enough to accelerate learning. Whole-school goals are similarly not clearly set out with timescales and interim measures, and this means the capacity of the school to review its progress is limited.

The principal has a strong vision for the school which is shared by the staff and parents. One clear element of this is that students will all be prepared to enter and complete their college programs because of the foundation they receive at The Bronx Studio School. Staff and parents welcome the planned move to a new building to accommodate the high school component of the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists	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