



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Bronx Academy of Letters**

**High School 551**

**339 Morris Avenue**

**Bronx**

**NY 10451**

**Principal: Joan Sullivan**

**Dates of review: March 24 - 26, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Vic Chaffey**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Bronx Academy of Letters is a high school with 416 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 35% Black, 63% Hispanic and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 35% of the students enrolled and girls account for 65%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 75% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Students and parents recognize that the school has high expectations that they will achieve as much as possible.
- The school's enrichment program supplements the curriculum very well and is effective in raising the aspirations and broadening the horizons of students.
- The school uses data well to support the achievement and progress of individual students, classes and grades.
- Special education students and English language learners make very good progress, because of the targeted individual support they receive.
- A strong staff team works well collaboratively to move the school forward.
- Scheduling is used in an innovative way to improve the performance of students with the greatest need.
- The school's guidance and advisory systems contribute well to individual student progress.
- Excellent relationships between staff and students are based on mutual trust and respect.
- The school's administrative teams have created a management structure that actively monitors and promotes students' progress and achievements.
- The professional development of all staff improves teacher knowledge and classroom performance.

### What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the use of data to support the progress and achievement of subgroups, particularly boys.
- Take greater advantage of differentiated approaches to teaching and learning.
- Develop students' self-reflection skills so they can identify their own strengths and weaknesses and participate in setting personal targets and goals.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

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

### **Overall Evaluation**

#### **This school is well developed.**

The school's goal, working in conjunction with its major partner the Urban Assembly, is to ensure that every one of its students goes to college on a four-year undergraduate program. It works tirelessly to achieve this through its educational programs and through its enrichment activities. Significant fundraising activities by major partners are helping turn this dream into a reality.

The school has a very good system for the collection and analysis of data. The use of a database, updated daily, ensures that the school has a very clear view of the achievement of individual students, classes and grades. This system also effectively supports the progress of special education students and English language learners. However, other groups are not equally well understood and supported. A strong professional development program contributes to the very good standard of teaching throughout the school, though the use of different teaching styles and materials to promote differentiation needs further development to ensure consistent progress of all students.

Excellent staff and student relationships, linked to strong systems for guidance and support, create an environment where a high standard of teaching and learning can take place. The administrative structure of the school ensures that goals are set, monitored and reviewed for the school, classes and grades. While individual students do have goals, these tend to be set for them rather than based on students' self-reflection of their own strengths and weaknesses.

The improvement since the last Quality Review has been driven well by the principal, and assistant principals, although differentiation in certain areas of teaching and learning is not well developed. The inquiry team meets weekly and has identified a group of students who need extra support in math. They have assessed the problem and developed interventions to improve performance. It is too early yet to judge their effect

## **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 school's comprehensive database, which is updated daily by the data specialist, provides staff with a thorough understanding of the performance of individual students, classes, and grades. Manipulation of the data gives them information on any category or group within in the school and is, for instance, being widely used by advisors to plan guidance and support for students. There are plans in place to put the database online and make it accessible to students and parents. Staff use data, often collaboratively, to plan interventions to support students' progress. However, regular monitoring of the progress and performance of different ethnic and gender groups does not take place, although there are plans to do so. As a result, the school does not currently have as clear an understanding of the progress these groups. In contrast, support for special education students and English language learners is very good because data is used efficiently to judge the effect of intervention strategies and help plan new ones. The school has successfully tracked past performance and progress of students and has used this information to improve areas of identified weakness, most recently in two subject areas. As part of the Urban Assembly network, the school is able to compare itself very closely with the performance of other similar schools.

While all staff members have good grasp of the use and management of data to support individual students, they do not use it as well to inform class teaching or to reflect on the performance of different groups they teach.

**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 uses its comprehensive system of data analysis to assist the process of setting and monitoring school goals. It has excellent organizational structures in place that ensure goals are set, monitored and reviewed for subjects and grade levels. Individual student goals are set and monitored at the end of each marking period. These goals are set to ensure the continuing development of students. However, at present students do not make a significant contribution to determining their own goals. For instance, they do not use self-review and reflection to analyze their own strengths and weaknesses to help them identify strategies for their own improvement.

The school is very effective in identifying and providing interventions to support students with the greatest need. After these students are identified, often with the aid of the database, innovative scheduling is used in conjunction with targeted intervention strategies to meet their needs.

The school works hard to convey high expectations to parents and students. It has a goal of ensuring that students and their parents understand just how far they can go in

life and what they can achieve. To this end, the school works hard to communicate with parents, putting particular effort into outreach work to make contact with parents of underperforming students. The school does a good job of informing parents about the goals that are set so that they are able to help their children make as much progress as possible. Parents say that the school has an open door policy “from the top down” and that if they voice a concern, the school responds right away. They very much appreciate the extra effort staff makes to support their children. One said, “The staff are always here at the end of the day for the children.”

**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 school’s curriculum offering is constrained by a lack of physical space. All of the existing classrooms are used to maximum capacity during the school day. While the school delivers the mandated curriculum, it cannot deliver art or music and physical education has to be offered at the end of the day. This is a disappointment to staff, parents and students who would very much like to see these subjects taught during the school day. The school makes up for this by offering a range of other extra curricular activities and an impressive program of enrichment activities. These include placing students with some of the most prestigious institutions and universities in and around New York and the use of internships and visits to places as far away as Thailand and Japan. This program successfully broadens students’ horizons and is instrumental in raising their aspirations by providing experiences far beyond the school and Brooklyn.

Relationships between staff and students are exemplary. Students interviewed consider the advisory arrangements in place to have created a second family. One remarked, “Your advisory teacher is like having a second mother or father” and more generally another said, “I think they are always thinking about us.” Students keep the same advisor throughout their school career, which often creates strong links between student and advisor and strengthens home school relationships.

The principal has a clear understanding of differentiation and differentiated approaches to learning. Some staff members are beginning to integrate these into classroom practice, though use and knowledge currently varies between subject areas. In consequence, achievement and progress rates vary between classes and subjects. The school is very effective in making staffing and scheduling decisions based on data. It is innovative in restructuring the schedule to meet the needs of students.

**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.**

The administration makes frequent checks on the quality of instruction through formal and informal observations, and walkthroughs by the principal and assistant principals. Constructive written feedback supports these activities and staff value the comments,

guidance and support they receive. Targeted differentiated professional development, according to need and individual requests for development, has increased teacher effectiveness in the classroom. There are also opportunities for teachers to share good practice through working together and observing each other as they teach. The school's induction system for new staff works well and is enhanced with a three-day program for new members of staff prior to them taking up their positions. These measures, taken together, contribute to the school's high standard of teaching.

The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis because of the very good relationships between staff and students, the advisory system and because the student and family intervention team meets every day to deal with issues that require action. Disciplinary procedures work effectively and are supported by the "house system" that provides students with a focus and an opportunity to take part in activities that are not just academic in nature.

The school has developed a number of very good partnerships, most significant of which is the Urban Assembly. This organization is central to the school's mission of raising student aspirations and trying to ensure that all students leave the school to attend a four-year college. The organization provides much-needed fiscal support for the school to allow it to deliver its stated goals.

**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 well developed.**

The school's comprehensive meeting structure ensures procedures are in place to enable staff to share and interpret data, to discuss student progress and to review the strategies used to promote individual and whole class learning across the school. Objective and measurable goals are set for the school, for students, for classes and grades. This practice is well embedded in school routines. The continuous process of meetings and review ensures that monitoring of progress toward the achievement of goals takes place regularly. The school knows its students well and carefully plans the next steps each student needs to take to make progress. It sets interim goals for individuals through the advisory system and formally reviews progress at regular intervals throughout the year. Overall the school's system of goal setting and review is very effective and efficient, contributing significantly to the progress of all students.

The leadership and vision of the principal have created a very effective and efficient school. She and her team have created a school in which administrative and support structures allow students to be educated in a calm and supportive environment. As a result, it is possible for them to work toward their own and the school's goals.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Academy of Letters</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					X

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					X

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>