

# Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**The Brooklyn Latin School**

**High School 449**

**325 Bushwick Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11206**

**Principal: Jason Griffiths**

**Dates of review: April 22 - 23, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Marina Volanakis**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Brooklyn Latin School is a high school with 180 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 33.5% Black, 26.8% Hispanic, 11.2% White, 25.1% Asian, 1.7% American Indian students and 1.1% Multi. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 44.7% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55.3%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 95.6%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school is currently in its third year of operation, with plans to add a twelfth grade and graduate its first class of students next year.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal has successfully built a team of thoughtful, mission-driven educators and laid the foundation for rich and vibrant learning community. The school sets exceptionally high expectations both for students and staff, but its leaders have also created supportive structures and a strong sense of community that enable all to achieve their full potential. For students, this support takes the form of a well-functioning advisory program, a formalized process for ongoing reflection and individualized goal-setting, opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge through varied modalities, and continuous opportunities to share ideas and solve problems collaboratively. Teachers establish individualized professional development plans and receive ongoing coaching toward their goals from school leaders, while at the same time enhancing their instructional practice through multiple opportunities for structured collaborations with peers. The parents thus stand out as the only group whose voice is not actively solicited and whose ideas have not been fully integrated into school plans and processes.

Since last year's review, the school has made great strides in the collection, analysis, and use of data to drive school-wide and instructional planning. Teachers across all subject areas, including foreign languages and the arts, administer quarterly interim assessments aligned with their curriculum, and they work together in department teams to analyze the data from these assessments. Each team then develops detailed data-driven learning goals and instructional plans to address the needs of whole classes, small groups, and individual students, although in-class differentiation is not universally in place and the school utilizes a limited number of external support organizations. This system, as well as the parallel system for student goal setting in advisory sessions, falls short only in the absence of a formalized protocol for revisiting and evaluating prior goals to inform new ones. At the school level, leaders disaggregate student data to monitor the achievement of individuals, groups, and subgroups of students. They have not, however, developed a system to measure and analyze student progress over time. They use this data, as well as the other available accountability measures, to build school-wide plans that target identified needs.

The principal has effectively communicated to all staff, parents and students his vision of a school that promotes academic and personal excellence for a diverse community. A spirit of mutual respect and universal commitment to common goals permeate the school

and have created an environment where high levels of achievement, both in everyday work and on standardized assessments, have already become the norm.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has a strong, coherent vision for the future development of the school, which is supported by clear goals and detailed action plans.
- School leaders and teachers systematically gather and analyze student achievement data from a variety of sources to gain in-depth understandings of the learning needs of individuals and groups of students.
- The school has established a strong culture in which all students and adults demonstrate high levels of respect for one another and hold one another accountable for achieving high expectations.
- Teachers actively engage in a variety of opportunities to collaborate in the development of the curriculum and assessment tools, data analysis, examination of student work and instructional planning.
- School leaders regularly provide feedback to teachers about their instruction that is aligned with individual professional goals and needs.
- The school has strong systems for teachers and students to reflect on student achievement in all content areas and set individualized learning goals.
- Teachers across content areas administer regular interim assessments that are aligned with the curriculum in order to monitor student achievement and inform instructional planning.

### What the school needs to improve

- Create more ample opportunities for parents to offer input into individual student and school-wide goal-setting and improvement planning processes, and continue with plans to involve more external services in supporting student learning.
- Further develop systems for teachers and school leaders to track consistent data points over time in order to measure growth in individual students and groups of students.
- Increase the impact of individualized student goal-setting processes by creating interim opportunities for students and teachers to assess progress toward goals and make revisions that support differentiated learning.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is well developed.**

School leaders and faculty effectively gather and organize data from a variety of sources in order to gain a deep understanding of their students' academic achievement in all content areas. At the school level, the principal looks closely at students' performance levels on Regents exams, as well as various national measures. In between these annual assessments, he also conducts a close analysis of the students' course grades. He reviews individual grades to identify students for approbation and for academic support, and he disaggregates the data by grade level, course, and subgroup to identify trends and areas for development. Though the school is only home to a handful of English language learners and special education students, the principal keeps a close eye on their academic achievement. He is able to speak in detail about each student's course performance and Regents pass rate, as well as the academic supports they receive.

Teachers across all content areas, including foreign languages and the arts, have developed extensive systems for the collection and analysis of data about student strengths and learning needs. All teachers administer quarterly interim assessments, each aligned with their curriculum standards. They work together in department teams to analyze what the results reveal about student learning at the whole group, small group, and individual student level. Teachers also regularly administer a variety of performance assessments, including extended writing assignments, Socratic seminars, and oral presentations. They assess these using consistent rubrics that provide standardized data about student skills and understandings. The school has not, however, developed tools to organize performance assessment data to enable the monitoring of student progress over time.

The school also does an excellent job of communicating information about student learning with parents and the students themselves. At the middle of each term, all students meet with their advisors to reflect on their interim grades and develop learning goals. Parents receive progress reports by mail eight times per year, and they attend semiannual conferences at which their children report on their achievements and next learning steps. The school is also engaged in a two-year process of developing a website that will provide information about the school calendar as well as access to individual student achievement data. Parents report that they appreciate the school's open door policy and find the teachers and principal extremely accessible via phone and email. At the same time, the school has not yet formalized systems for soliciting parent input about their children's learning needs.

**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.**

The school has established two parallel processes for the development of data-driven learning goals for students. First, teachers in all content areas write goals for each class, for small groups of students with similar needs, and for individual students based on their analysis of interim assessment data. Students also engage in a formal goal-setting process with their faculty advisors at the midpoint of each term. This process includes individual reflection and conferences about students’ midterm grades in each content area, their areas for improvement, and their next steps. The culture of reflection and self-assessment also spills over into the school’s regular classroom practice. Students often write, for example, about the aspect of an assessment that they find most challenging, or about the misconceptions that led to their errors. Though data-driven goal-setting processes are thus strong, the school has not yet formalized a complementary protocol for assessing attainment of goals in order to make adjustments and inform the creation of new goals.

At a broader level, the school implements a thorough, data-informed process for the creation of annual goals and priorities. The leaders and faculty use the prior year’s Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, and student achievement data to identify key areas for improvement and to set measurable goals. They support each goal with a detailed action plan, which they regularly use to assess progress and define next steps. The school works hard to communicate the annual goals and longer-term vision for school-wide development to parents and students. This effort begins with the recruitment and orientation sessions for new students and parents and continues throughout the year. Although parents and students are well informed about school-wide plans, they do not yet play an active role in the development of school goals.

The school’s high expectations for its students are evident in every classroom and every lesson. School leaders and faculty consistently applaud high levels of achievement and swiftly attend to instances when students fall short of expectations. These strategies have yielded a school environment where there are virtually no disciplinary infractions, where students rarely miss a day of school, and where students demonstrate high levels of sophistication in their writing, thinking, and articulation of ideas.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

Teams of teachers have dedicated substantial time to the development of a curriculum that aligns with both State and International Baccalaureate standards, as well as detailed curriculum maps for each course. Although these efforts are to some extent still a work in progress, the school has made excellent progress in this area.

Lessons are rigorous and students demonstrate high levels of engagement and intellectual curiosity. In almost all classrooms, teachers use effective questioning techniques to promote development of higher ordered thinking skills. Another hallmark of the school’s instructional model is the use of collaborative group work. Throughout

the day, students spend time conferring with their peers to discuss ideas, solve problems, and evaluate one another's work. Although teachers do not always maximize student learning by deliberately forming needs-based groups, they do use group time effectively by circulating to assess student understanding and address individual needs.

Teachers use data from regular assessments to develop instructional plans to meet the learning needs of small groups and individual students. They also cater to different students' learning styles by offering choices within their assessments as well as a variety of different modes of assessment. Plans for differentiation often rely heavily, however, on the provision of individual and small-group support during lunch, study hall, and extended day hours. As a result, teachers do not yet draw upon the full range of strategies to tailor instructional materials and processes within their lessons themselves.

The principal has a strong vision for the future development of the school, and he makes organizational decisions and allocates resources with this end in mind. He has invested significantly in the adoption of the International Baccalaureate program, for example, and he has developed a long-term financial plan for the development of a library that will become the heart of the school.

There is a strong culture of trust and respect among students and staff. Relationships among teachers are open, collegial, and driven by a desire to help one another improve. Teachers universally demonstrate respect for their students and take time to get to know them both as learners and individuals. Students identify the close-knit community as one of the school's strengths, describing their school as being "united as a family."

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

Systems to support the professional growth of teachers are very strong and result in thoughtful, effective teaching throughout the school. Upon entry into the school, every teacher undergoes extensive orientation to the school's unique methods and culture, as well as a one-on-one session with the principal to develop individualized professional goals and plans. Every staff member revisits these goals formally with the principal during a midyear review and an annual exit interview in June, at which times they reflect on progress, make edits, and/or write new goals. In addition to these consistent formal check-ins, the principal and principal resident visit classrooms very regularly and quickly give teachers feedback aligned with their individual professional development goals.

Teachers are encouraged to and often do go outside the school to attend workshops and conferences related to their content area. Teachers report that they derive the greatest professional benefit, however, from the many opportunities they have to engage in collaborative inquiry. The school offers a variety of structures and protocols to promote a thriving professional learning community. Each department serves as its own inquiry team, using weekly meetings to engage in data-driven processes that have resulted in the development of curricula, rubrics, assessments, and instructional plans with focused attention on the most struggling students. Teachers also participate in monthly case studies of individual students who are struggling across content areas. These case studies provide fertile ground for the close examination of student work and development of new support strategies. Finally, many teachers engage in a monthly "critical friends group" protocol, through which they work together to develop new approaches to address one of their colleagues' professional concerns.

In addition to two guidance counselors who support students' personal development, a strong advisory program ensures that every student in the school develops a close relationship with one consistent staff member over four years. A ninth-grade skills class also provides opportunities for students to develop key competencies that ease the transition from middle to high school. Despite these targeted programs, parents report that the high expectations and workload often overwhelm new ninth graders, and they see support to new families and students as an area for improvement. The school has plans to develop partnerships with community organizations that will sponsor student service learning projects, but the implementation of such plans is still in its early phases.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.**

At all levels, ongoing reflection, self-evaluation, and adjustment of short-term plans figures prominently in the culture of the school. At the school level, each annual goal is supported by detailed action plans. School leaders regularly evaluate their progress on each of their action steps, as well as toward the overarching goal. The principal is able to describe the steps that the school has taken to promote achievement of each of its goals, and the areas where he is not as confident that they will get there. Where the school has failed to meet all of its benchmarks, he is able not only to provide explanations, but also to articulate the implications of these shortfalls for future planning.

The leadership engages in a similar process of monitoring and evaluation with regard to its teachers. In addition to formal check-ins with each teacher twice a year, the leaders regularly visit classrooms and provide quick feedback to teachers. They are thus able to speak knowledgeably about each teacher's professional development path, including the progress they have made and the issues around which they continue to be coached.

The teachers themselves also engage in ongoing development, reflection, and adjustment of their instructional plans. They have developed detailed curriculum maps for each course, which serve as a guide for their quarterly assessments. After each assessment, teachers work together to evaluate student mastery of the curriculum on a class, small group, and individual student level. They then adjust their instructional plans to meet the needs of their students. Finally, the students consistently engage in self-evaluation and adjustment of goals. Twice per quarter, they meet with their advisors to review class grades, discuss strengths and weaknesses, and agree on next steps. This formal process complements the journal writing and small-group discussion that occur frequently in classes to encourage reflection and self-improvement. Although students frequently set new goals, they do not revisit past goals, determine whether they have achieved them, and use them to inform the development of next steps.

The school's leaders have not only a clear vision for the future, but a roadmap to get them there. Staff work hard each spring to communicate this vision to all prospective students and parents, to ensure that the families who choose the school do so have fully bought in to its mission and understand the rationale for its many unique features. Students appreciate the school for all that it offers them, and they share in the vision for its future development. One student even commented on the enhanced opportunities the school would provide future generations of students, but stated that she preferred to occupy her place in history as a member of the school's founding class.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: The Brooklyn Latin School</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				<b>X</b>
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				<b>X</b>
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				<b>X</b>
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?				<b>X</b>
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

## DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.</b>							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X			
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?				X			
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X			
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?				X			
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?				X			
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?				X			
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>