

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Brownsville Academy High School

High School 568

**1150 East New York Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: LaShawn Robinson

Dates of review: May 7 - 8, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Frank Jones

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Brownsville Academy is a high school with 210 students from grade 10 through grade 12. The school population comprises 86% Black, 12% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 66.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 66% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Brownsville Academy High is an exceptional school that is unremitting in its desire and drive to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of students who have previously failed to achieve enough from their earlier education. The outstanding leadership of the principal has inspired and empowered both staff and students to raise their self-belief. The 'can do, must do' that is inherent in the culture of the school results in highly motivated and dedicated staff and student body. The strategic development of the school is meticulously planned, informed by high quality data and the client base it serves. This purposeful direction is fundamental to and responsible for the increase in student achievement that is a hallmark of the school. The school uses data trends over time to develop pertinent, quantifiable goals for its Comprehensive Educational Plan but does not yet take fully into account individual student performance when establishing the goals. The comprehensive range of data streams is exceptionally well understood and used by staff who combine with students to formulate focused goals that provide specific pathways to success. This process is further enhanced by the goal setting meetings that establish the incremental learning steps required to achieve them. Close monitoring and on-line tracking systems provide accurate measures of student performance and progress. The school utilizes this information particularly well to conference with students and realigns programs with the aim to eradicate any deficits.

Staff are totally committed and frequently give of their own time to support students who in turn develop in confidence, speak highly of their teachers and express their gratitude for the personal care and attention they receive. Effective professional development opportunities are directed at teachers who welcome opportunities to further widen their instructional strategies and become more proficient in their teaching. Individualized teaching goals are not in place. However classroom observations are perceptive and demonstrate great insight in to the learning process. This results in teachers receiving focused areas for improvement and extremely good advice on how to further extend their instructional repertoire. Similarly the exceptionally professional work of the inquiry teams is having a significant impact on teaching approaches and therefore student learning. The school exudes an atmosphere of the considerable care and concern shown to all underpinned by extremely high expectations that ensure failure is not an option and where all are learners are committed to improvement. The rich learning environment provides students with opportunities and challenges they have previously not experienced. Students therefore are helped to be self-assured and grow in stature. In her short tenure the principal has introduced a relaxed leadership style, placed an emphasis on student achievement and added distinct rigor to the learning process.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students are active participants in determining their personal goals, have ownership and value the opportunities they are afforded to contribute to the strategic development of their school.
- The comprehensive data the school collects is extremely well used to monitor student progress and accurately identify the next steps in individual and group learning.
- The principal is extremely passionate about and totally committed to providing students with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will greatly enhance their life opportunities.
- With great acumen, the principal, assistants and staff have successfully re-aligned the strategic direction of the school to bring a robust focus on improving learning and teaching and therefore student outcomes.
- The mutually supportive and extremely purposeful culture that pervades the school is reflected in very high expectations, exceptionally good relationships and a learning environment that is particularly rich in quality and experiences.
- The exceptional work of the inquiry teams is having a significant impact on improving the understanding teachers have in addressing student learning needs enabling them to realign and refocus their teaching as required.
- Staff appreciate greatly the relaxed and open leadership of the school which is beginning to empower them and is reflected in their exceptional commitment to the students and in implementing the aims of the school.

Areas for improvement

- Link the outcomes of the existing high quality classroom teacher observations with teachers' self-evaluation to develop and formalize the differentiated professional development goals for all staff.
- Further refine and improve the accuracy of the well-targeted school goals by aggregating individual student performance data to develop more accurate class, subject and school targets.
- Continue to develop and expand the range of teaching strategies employed by the staff, especially those that enable students to explore their thinking and articulate their understanding.

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.

The school collects an extensive amount of pertinent data from numerous assessment sources which include ARIS, *Castle Learning* and *Diploma Plus* competencies. This provides the school with an extremely detailed record of the performance and progress of each student. The data is further supplemented by evidence from Regents results, student work and conferencing. This valuable data is intelligently analyzed to identify trends over time and any emerging patterns. The staff are supported well by a data specialist and are very competent and confident in their understanding and use of data; close scrutiny of which ensures that student achievement is carefully monitored and tracked enabling precise interventions to occur immediately to remedy any deficits in performance. As one student ruefully commented, "If you slow down they notice!" Departments discuss the information and use the results of their analysis effectively to inform their practice. Regular conversations take place at all levels in the school and between all constituents who are precisely aware of what each student knows, can do and the skills they have mastered. The exceptional cognizance taken of data is fundamental to the extremely good use made of it in the goal setting process.

The school recognizes the importance of student attendance and therefore closely monitors and analyzes trends. Swift action follows a report of absence and includes phone calls and home visits. Those students whose attendance rate is high earn incentives and rewards. As a result there has been a significant increase in the percentage of students who regularly attend and the school compares favorably to its peer horizon group. Parents are highly involved in their child's education from the beginning as it is a pre-requisite that they attend the interview for placement in the school. This reinforces the partnership that the school expects and reflects the inclusive philosophy that the school enacts. Parents are appreciative of the high level of engagement the school has with them, which enables close monitoring and a corporate approach to support students in achieving their goals. Formal consultation processes are in place but the key communication is made through the weekly progress reports and additional phone calls. This critical attention and exchange of information is influential in ensuring the academic and personal needs of each student are met.

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.

Students are highly involved in their own development and the direction it takes. This provides them with purpose and understanding but importantly ownership and control of their futures. The extensive data is used exceptionally well to formulate a long-term aim,

usually graduation, and the precise steps with which to achieve this goal. Incremental goal setting takes place in each subject. These are carefully monitored to ensure students are on track. Weekly conferencing is proving to be a powerful tool for moving students forward and for allowing the well-informed discourse to take place. The tenor of these conferences according to one student speaking very positively about the process is “this is where you are, this is where you are going and this is how to get there”. This clarity of direction results in secure progress. Students engage in their own self-evaluation and *Castle Learning* provides a monthly assessment of student strengths and deficit areas. This current, detailed assessment enables adjustments to be made to programs or teaching which then accurately focuses on future learning. The school is rigorous in its analysis of student outcomes and this is the prime driving force for teachers, students and their families. Therefore goals are apposite and strategies to achieve them firmly direct the learning that takes place. Students understand what is required of them because they are an integral part of the process

The principal has been exceptionally pro-active in implementing strategies to consult parents, students and staff to ascertain their views about future school development which then inform the Comprehensive Educational Plan. This ensures all concerned contribute and have ownership of the programs provided. There is a productive synergy between the personal goals of the principal and those for the school. All goals are directly focused on raising student achievement specifically where data illustrates the need to increase performance. Trends over time have been analyzed to arrive at quantifiable levels of improvement but less attention has been given to the current levels of student achievement to add additional precision. Goals are regularly monitored to ensure planned progress is being maintained and to permit adjustments if necessary

The whole premise of the school is predicated on high expectation from all, for all. The oft repeated mantra, ‘we are the best’ is a constant reinforcement that success will increase life opportunities. Students understand this and strive hard to match the expectations of them and they increasingly have of themselves. As one student said, “They don’t look at me as I was then; they look at me for what I can be.” This is a diploma plus school. The additional requirements reflect the depth of effort students have to put in to graduate. As one parent aptly said, “They don’t give students grades, they have to earn them.”

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.

The wide ranging curriculum is rich in content and closely aligned to New York State Standards and importantly mirrors the *Diploma Plus* competencies. Therefore, the needs of the students are addressed. Sequential development is maintained through curriculum maps which give cohesion and direction to learning. Cross-curricular links are in place that enables students to apply learned skills in other situations. This increases their understanding through application and brings further relevance to their learning. Students are able to take advantage of the school’s exceptionally good facilities. The well used dance studios, art rooms, ceramics, forensics, creative arts and science labs support and augment the standard curriculum providing additional excitement and understanding to learning. All students are required to participate in extended internships if they are to graduate. These are enjoyed by students who benefit

from the opportunity to experience work placements that increase their awareness of the possibilities ahead of them.

Teachers utilize data very well and are becoming increasingly adept at matching tasks to student need. Consequently, student learning is well focused and engagement in most lessons is high but in some classes, students are given insufficient opportunity to discuss ideas and explore their own thinking. On these occasions learning becomes formulaic and opportunities are not necessarily maximized.

Through judicious use of the budget the principal has put in place structures and strategies that support both teaching and learning. Purchase of smart boards and the very good use of technology have increased the development of skills and provided additional interest to the learning process. Students use technology with confidence to present and improve their work, especially the detailed portfolios they are required to complete prior to graduation. Provision is made for students to attend Saturday school or access on-line courses to accelerate their credit accumulation. This has resulted in a significant number of students graduating early. This provides a good illustration to the commitment that they have to succeeding. Students state that they are grateful for the extra attention they are given and appreciate that they benefit enormously from it.

Relationships at all levels and between all in the school community are extremely good. The school exudes an atmosphere of calm and immense purpose. Students speak exceptionally highly of the principal and teachers, understanding that they can seek help in the knowledge that such help will be immediately forthcoming. The care and consideration students receive is for many of them the first time they have been listened to or their aspirations supported. This is a school that has created a learning environment that is immensely rich in quality and experience yet highly sensitive to need.

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.

The hiring of a lead teacher and an assistant principal who is in charge of instruction has realigned the focus of the school and given an important message about the impact of teaching on continually improving student outcomes. The extremely professional classroom observations provide teachers with an exceptionally robust assessment of teacher strengths and development areas. Teachers do not have individual differentiated goals that focus on improvement. However the high quality of evaluation that takes place and suggestions for improvement are well supported with professional development strategies. One teacher stated, "Observations are very good, constructive and are a great way to open up a dialogue". Teachers are becoming more self-evaluative and this reflection assists in further improving their practice.

Although individualized teaching goals are not in place formally, many opportunities exist for teachers to improve their practice. Professional development is readily available and frequently targeted at individual or corporate need. Teachers report that they benefit from courses in areas such as differentiated instruction. The impact of which is measured through classroom observations. School based development takes a variety of forms including teachers being able to meet together to discuss data, student performance, develop instructional strategies and share best practice. When possible inter-visitations take place and teachers are mutually supportive in their desire to improve their personal and other's instruction. This healthy culture ensures that the

school is a dynamic learning institution. Virtually 90% of staff are members of inquiry teams. They have engaged in controlled, detail research using available data to identify their target group linked to underperformance in Regents and attendance. By studying trends and revising programs this has subsequently increased achievement for the inquiry sample. This exceptionally rigorous approach is having a significant impact on improving the understanding teachers have in addressing student learning needs enabling them to re align and refocus their teaching as required. The direct link to the school's key goals underlines the quality of strategic thought and unified approaches throughout the school. Teachers who are new to the school consider they receive all the support they need. They feel entirely comfortable that should they encounter an issue then constructive help is readily at hand. Students benefit in the same way. Teachers clearly understand the needs of the student group they are responsible for and are able to talk in confidence with them. Social workers and counselors add to this care to deal with personal and emotional needs as they arise. Links with other agencies are numerous and greatly enrich the positive experiences of students. This is particularly true of the many internships that take place through the school's 'Learn to Work' partners.

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.

This is a school that has evaluation at the centre of all it does. The information provided by in-depth analysis of significant data is evaluated and strategies for improvement emerge. These are always measurable, time scaled and subsequently carefully monitored for impact. The school is flexible in its approach and readily realigns programs to suit individual student need to enable them to fulfill their potential. As a result the direction of the school is always well informed and allows the school to rigorously focus on student outcomes. The curriculum is rich and varied but crucially aligned to meeting student need. Similarly the school recognizes the causality between good teaching and effective learning. As a result it implements professional development and effective observation strategies that improve teacher growth understanding and practical skills. The school has created time for teachers to work together, which they find extremely valuable and results in an extremely cohesive approach to address student development needs.

The principal is quite certain about her expectations for the students and therefore what the school has to do to meet them. Her vision is clear, communicated to and embraced by the student, staff and wider school community. Staff are prepared to work exceptionally hard for the students and to make the vision a reality. The principal is a strategic thinker of high quality but has the professional expertise and interpersonal skills to ensure strategy is transferred in to action. Her total commitment and passion for each student to acquire the knowledge and skills to prepare them for and increase their life opportunities is infectious. The school has a wonderful capacity to sustain and further accelerate the success it is already achieving. As their mantra goes, "we are the best".

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Brownsville Academy High School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
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.				
<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?				X
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				X
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?				X
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?				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 student’s learning.				
<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?				X
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				X
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?				X
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?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

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, DY0, 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.

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.

To what extent do ...	△	➤	✓	+
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
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X

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.

To what extent do school leaders...	△	➤	✓	+
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
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X

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.

To what extent do ...	△	➤	✓	+
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
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X

Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed