

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

William Cullen Bryant High School

**High School 445
48-10 31 Avenue
Queens
NY 11103**

Principal: Aaron Perez

**Dates of review: March 23 – 24 and
April 30 – May 1, 2009**

Lead Reviewer: Frank Knowles

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

William Cullen Bryant is a high school with 3161 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 10% Black, 48% Hispanic, 15% White, and 27% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 85.0%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The illness of the original reviewer meant that the review, which began on March 23, 2009, was completed on 30 April and 1 May by a second reviewer, who authored the report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

In his first year in post, the principal has enhanced the work of the school through an open, empowering and thoughtful approach to leadership. One parent reflected the view of staff and students when she said, "This was a good choice of a new principal." His approach builds on the previous strengths of the school. Staff are enthusiastic about working at the school and students are positive about the support they receive from individual staff and the wide range of programs on offer. These include programs tailored to the specific needs of students, including those who need extra support and high-achieving students who need additional challenge. The school is successful in integrating English language learners as quickly as possible into general education classes.

Students recognize the school's strong focus on high achievement through their review of individual goals in conference with their teachers. Goals, set following the analysis of a wide range of data, provide a good focus for teachers to differentiate learning. The essential elements of the goal-setting process, those of identifying an individual goal, deciding on the action needed to achieve it, and reviewing its success, are not fully embedded across the school. Similarly, while there is much good practice in differentiated learning throughout the school, this too is not universally in place. Teachers use achievement and other data well to plan instruction and regularly review their plans in departments. They are supported in this by the extensive range of data analysis undertaken in the school and within their content areas. The inquiry team's work to date has involved only a small group of staff and has focused strongly on an in-depth analysis of students' needs within the target group. This means that insufficient staff have developed an understanding of the inquiry process and its potential to impact positively on student achievement.

A team of committed assistant principals, held accountable to the principal and with delegated responsibility for their subjects, work hard to develop better instructional and goal-setting practices. As yet, however, the cabinet does not have a collective whole-school understanding of the key elements of differentiation, goal setting and evaluation that are needed within the diverse contexts of their departments.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school makes good use of its analysis of data on student performance, progress, attendance and behavior to match programs to student need and provide support and intervention for individual students and groups that fall behind.
- The new principal's leadership has provided a seamless transition in which strengths have been maintained, areas for improvement have been securely based on students' needs and actions have been targeted at achieving improved outcomes for students.
- The school's curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and provides a challenging program for students at all levels and in all grades, including opportunities that stretch high-achieving students, well-targeted interventions for those who need support and a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Teachers' recent professional development in the use of data has resulted in good use of available data to plan instruction.
- A climate of mutual support and respect in the school means that students feel safe and welcome, and respond well to the high expectations the school has of them, both in academic performance and personal development.
- Regular review of data by the cabinet, departments and faculty reinforces the school's strong focus on high achievement among staff and students, and results in changes to programs, instruction and support for individuals and subgroups of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Set out clearly the school's expectations for differentiated learning in all classes, provide differentiated training for teachers where it is needed, and ensure that instruction consistently provides suitable challenges, activities, resources and support that match the needs of individual students.
- Bring greater consistency to the setting of goals by focusing more strongly on the goals, the actions to be taken to achieve them and a subsequent review to reshape the action or goal where the goal is not met.
- Work with the cabinet to establish common understanding among its members of key focuses of accountability such as differentiation, the goal-setting process, and evaluating the impact of departmental action plans.
- Develop the work of the inquiry team to include more staff and a greater focus on evaluating the impact of intervention strategies.

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 gathers and analyzes a wealth of data on students' performance and progress in all subjects, attendance and behavior. Much of the analysis covers the whole school, for example involving ARIS and scholarship reports. These common, school-wide approaches are supplemented by subject-specific analyses. Departments analyze a range of their own data, for example surveys on students' learning styles and a range of in-house tests.

The school operates a baseline-testing program in English language arts and math when students join the school to place them quickly on appropriate courses, in addition to using information from students' previous schools. Of particular note is the extensive assessment program in the English as a second language department. Here, staff accurately establish skill levels in English through one-on-one conferencing and testing. The results are then provided for all content areas and departments combine them with their own assessments when placing students. The good use of data extends to teacher level, where test and other assessment outcomes and item analyses are used well to focus instruction. In addition, teachers use conferences and in-class formative assessments to gain a very clear understanding of students' academic strengths and where improvement or faster progress is needed.

The school has a strong focus on outcomes in all its analyses. As well as understanding the performance and progress of individual students, the school is aware of areas of underperformance among particular subgroups and provides support through, for example, ramp-up programs. Data is shared readily between departments. In particular, the instructional support services (ISS) department liaises fully with subject departments over assessment data, support needs and individual education plans. All teachers have recently received professional development in the use of decile measures in interpreting data and many use the ARIS system frequently.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's achievement. As well as end-of-marking-period report cards, they value the additional comments made by teachers, the extensive telephone and email contact many have with faculty, and the use of the school's website to gain information and make contact with the school.

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.

Students have individual subject goals in all subjects, generally set through one-on-one conferences with their teachers about their performance and progress, and they articulate these clearly. Students’ and faculty’s understanding of the process of setting a goal, identifying what action they need to take to reach it, and then reviewing progress towards it is not universal, however. In one exemplary use of goals, students had set a range of specific goals for music performance with their teacher and, after practicing the piece, reviewed the goals themselves. Subsequent input by the teacher helped them to reset the goal at a higher level and understand their next steps in improving the performance. Some confusion between action and goal, however, and a tendency not to be specific enough in the action, reduces the effectiveness of this process for many students. All teachers have individual development goals and these are reviewed regularly with their assistant principal. Some teachers’ goals, for example to provide more support for groups of students, lead to a greater focus on what the students should do than the actions to be taken by the teacher.

The impact of the school’s strong focus on goal setting is that students understand and strive to achieve the high expectations set by the school. Their parents, too, are involved through their contact with staff and their parents. The participation of students in regular student-teacher conferences serves to maintain this level of expectation through the year. Achievement of individual, teacher and school goals is a central focus of the school’s cabinet and, at department level, of faculty. Guidance counselors are also fully involved in the process. This focus on goals extends to the construction of the Comprehensive Educational Plan, which involves the cabinet fully in setting departmental goals that align with the school’s goals before the overall plan is agreed by the school leadership team.

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 proficient.

The school offers a broad curriculum and a range of annualized courses designed to provide appropriate levels of challenge, based on data analysis, for all students. The creation of double-period and ramp-up support classes serves students who need more time to learn, and collaborative team teaching classes and self-contained classes meet a range of student needs. Advanced English language learners benefit from the use of the internet-based Achieve3000 program and regular monitoring of their progress. A range of Advanced Placement courses service higher achieving students and College Now courses are also available thorough LaGuardia Community College. A strong arts program includes theater and various disciplines in art and music. Business programs are supported through the school’s full involvement with the Virtual Enterprise organization. A wide range of enrichment programs and many extra-curricular clubs and activities enhances the regular curriculum.

Instructional practices vary and there is wide and effective use of the workshop model, as well as whole-class instruction that does not always meet the needs of the full range of students in the class. Similarly, many teachers show good or exceptional practice in differentiation while others provide well-focused but undifferentiated resources that do not provide sufficient challenge for all. For example, students in a global history class worked on the same task in a creative group activity when they had to market an ancient Chinese invention to other students, and where the very good differentiation was tailored to student achievement by the complexity of the invention allocated by the teacher. In an English language arts class, students worked on different chapters of a book to interpret suitably challenging features and make a presentation to the rest of the class. In contrast, some whole-class instruction skated over important questions asked by students to ensure the teacher covered the material.

The cabinet regularly reviews achievement data and allocates resources, for example additional classes or improved technology, to ensure students receive the best chance of success in reaching their goals. The principal delegates well to departments with clear lines of accountability. This distributed leadership to departments has many strengths, not least the empowerment, drive and hard work of the assistant principals. As a result, there are high levels of mutual trust and respect among staff and between staff and students. Students and parents value this and the way staff are prepared to give their time willingly for those students who need academic or personal support.

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 proficient.

Supervisors make rigorous observations of classes taught by teachers in their departments and provide constructive feedback. Walkthroughs by the principal, alongside the relevant assistant principal, mean that the school has a consistent view of the quality of instruction. Concerns triggered through these observations and walkthroughs result in support to bring about improvement and further observations to check progress. The school also provides a range of in-house and external professional development programs to support teachers in meeting the goals in their professional development plans. Some whole-school professional development in data interpretation and the use of ARIS has meant the use of data by teachers is now universal. Inconsistent understanding of areas such as differentiated learning and goal setting have not yet been addressed in a coherent but differentiated way, however. At department level, many teachers are well used to evaluating their classroom practice with a focus on student outcomes, but this is not always the case.

The school makes effective use of a range of community-based organizations to support the personal and academic progress of students. Cultural support for students from different backgrounds involves, for example, the South Asia Youth Association. Global Kids provides input with an international perspective. In-house mediation training involves students in work with their peers and referrals to support disadvantage have been supportive of students in need.

The inquiry team has moved into its second year with a renewed target group, but has spent more of its time on identification of precise need than on providing intervention services or support and evaluating their success. The small number of staff involved also means that few additional staff, in such a large school, have had access to the action research process that the inquiry approach promotes.

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 proficient.

The principal's first year in post has been successful. Students, staff and parents alike noted that, "It's a hard act to follow a successful principal." While maintaining the school's strengths and tackling a number of issues that needed addressing, the principal is recognized universally as having created a very open personal rapport with staff and students which has supported them in continuing to feel a strong sense of belonging to the school. Parents, too, recognize this gradual development from a good base. Current plans to revisit the school's vision and mission statements are at too early a stage of implementation to evaluate their success, but they focus appropriately on meeting the needs of all students.

Whole-school plans receive regular review by the cabinet, and the principal is fully behind the need to focus strongly on the impact of actions and decisions taken. This focus has not yet become embedded throughout the school, however. The principal and cabinet undertake regular reviews of data to support departments in bringing about improved instruction. Plans, including departmental plans, contain informal interim timelines and benchmarks to support review, but these are not as explicit or specific as they could be. In departments, regular reviews of student achievement and progress are used to make changes in instructional approaches. Individual faculty members are fully involved in reviewing the progress made by their classes to identify where changes might be needed and then implementing them.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: William Cullen Bryant 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, DYO, 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.							
<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			
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.							
<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				
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.							
<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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	▷	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed