

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School

**High School 227
240 East 172nd Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Ryan Scallon

**Dates of review: May 13 – 14 2009
Lead Reviewer: Lawrence H. Block**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School is a high school with 405 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33% Black, 63% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 83.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 89% eligibility. This is the principal's first year as leader of the school.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school's motto: "We are crew, not passengers", exemplifies the spirit of collaboration and ownership with which the staff approach their work. The principal, new in his role, has set a clear direction for the school, grounded in a reflective and performance data-driven representation of its strengths and weaknesses. Students and parents appreciate the caring faculty and feel supported by them. This sense of responsiveness extends to the school leaders, who have adjusted programs and added courses to reflect general student learning needs.

There is a strong culture of collaboration among teachers, who meet regularly to share instructional plans and information about student learning needs. In general, students speak favorably about the level of teacher support that they receive. Some students also discuss with enthusiasm their work on special projects, such as those presented in yearly expos and intensive classes. This year, the school introduced "do your own" assessments in all subjects in an attempt to standardize the collection of interim data. While there are good examples of teachers' use of interim data to personalize instruction, school leaders acknowledge the need to formalize systems to improve the definition and communication of individual student learning goals and to track regular progress toward meeting them. The lack of systemic analysis of interim student learning outcomes contributes to instruction that is not sufficiently differentiated to challenge and support all students. Additionally, it lessens the ability of school leaders to evaluate school plans consistently or to make effective revisions that lead to improved student progress.

Teachers have a wide range of professional development offerings from which to choose. The use of laptops has facilitated staff communication about student learning outcomes. However, the school's professional development plan does not reflect a formalized use of data to guide differentiated teacher improvement goals that link student progress with instructional strategies. The school is conducting a series of year-end and summer meetings to further address current issues and plan for future school improvement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal embraces distributive leadership and has a sound understanding of the school's strengths and needs.
- School leaders and faculty gather a range of relevant data across all subjects to understand student performance and to identify key weaknesses of the school.
- The respectful and nurturing school culture and caring staff contribute to the supportive environment for students' academic and personal progress.
- School leaders make responsive organizational decisions based on student performance data to support improvements in student learning.
- The principal has established strong staff relationships and collaborative teams to discuss the needs of individual students and improve instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish robust systems for analyzing student data school-wide to exchange accurate information about student learning needs and to track student progress rigorously towards achievement goals.
- Use relevant data consistently to set long- and short-term goals for each student's academic improvement and evaluate interim progress to make necessary revisions to planning.
- Monitor each student's progress toward achieving academic and personal goals and implement regular communication systems to keep community members informed about student progress.
- Improve the use of data to inform curricular and instructional planning to create engaging, challenging and differentiated learning activities and flexible groupings to meet the specific needs of all students.
- Use relevant student data and structured observations to develop and monitor teachers' professional goals, checkpoints and development plans to accelerate student 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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school collects and analyzes a wide range of data that reveals achievement trends and areas that require school improvement. This year, the school developed "do your own" interim assessments (DYO's) in each core subject to paint a more comprehensive picture of student performance. The school has identified performance trends of a number of subgroups in the areas of credit accumulation, Regents results and attendance, with particular attention to English language learners, special education students, and seniors who are not on track to meet promotional requirements. Using this data, they have implemented interventions such as the use of senior contracts and mentors, which have resulted in a notable increase in senior students who are "catching up" on meeting these requirements.

There are instances, such as in some math, English language arts and Regents classes, where there is instruction targeted towards the learning styles, interests and abilities of the students. Using the DYO's, the school identifies the lowest performers in each content area and defines the common needs of the students. A teacher described this information as, "a good aerial view" of student learning requirements. However, the general profile furnished by the DYO assessments does not provide consistent information from one assessment to the next. This impedes teachers' abilities to develop individual goals and plans, and to track student progress systematically.

Parent open-house events, individual conferences with teachers or guidance personnel and periodic report cards keep parents informed of student progress. Parents report that teachers routinely communicate with them by phone. Recently, students developed general next steps in advisory classes as a response to their report cards, but the school does not have systems to communicate these consistently to the parents.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan is developed collaboratively to delineate goals for school-wide and subject areas that are aligned carefully to departmental performance targets. Teachers set specific class goals for student achievement, and the principal has begun to develop timelines to check progress regularly toward these goals. The curriculum-planning template used by the school sets the foundation for teacher development of subject and class goals. This template has led to teachers building units that include specific objectives relating to what students should know and be able to do. Recently, the school planned a series of school-wide meetings to discuss the further

development and implementation of these goals and action plans to improve practices next year.

The process for setting and communicating individualized learning goals and plans to meet them is not consistent across the school. There are good examples of using information from assessments to plan personalized instruction in some English and math classes, but this is not practiced regularly in all lessons or subjects. Consequently, some students are unable to articulate specific content goals or next learning steps toward improving achievement and their progress is hampered. Parents also report that although general communication is good, there is a lack of detail and documentation about student progress goals. One student exemplified this lack of definition when he said, "I know I have to study more, but what do I have to study more in?"

The school has high expectations for all students that are communicated through the distribution of a student handbook at the beginning of each year. There are effective structures to help students complete and extend academic requirements. Equally, Math and Poetry Cafés, intensive study periods and fieldwork internships reflect the expectation that all students will be supported to progress academically regardless of their academic levels. Additionally, courses such as advanced placement and advanced math and science classes convey the school's focus on college preparation. As a result of opening a college office this year, the principal reports an increase in college applications. Celebrations occur when students attain attendance and scholarship benchmarks that are communicated to the school community to increase awareness of student achievements. The principal has designed an action plan to address the recent decline in attendance; however, it is too early to gauge the impact.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

This year, the intensive expeditionary courses have been modified to incorporate Regents topics and skills. This enables students to work toward improving their test performance in classes designed to support them. The school is developing suitable standards-based curricular materials in all core subjects and offers fitting choices in its curricular sequence for a range of abilities. However, instruction does not sufficiently challenge the students. Learning targets are very general and there are no consistent efforts to meet the needs of the lowest- and highest-achieving youngsters in most classes. Teachers are increasing the regularity and uniformity of their assessments to check for understanding and to differentiate their teaching. Nevertheless, in many classes, this has not resulted in precise learning goals to guide challenging and engaging instruction for individual students. Some teachers use technology, such as Smart boards, to add visual elements that engage students in lessons, but there is little evidence of flexible groupings to indicate personalized and targeted instruction.

Resources are allocated purposefully to meet student performance requirements and the instructional needs of teachers, who welcome the improved availability of classroom materials. As one teacher commented, "Last year, we had to make do with what we had. Now, we are asked what we need." Common periods are scheduled effectively to facilitate collaborative planning meetings and consultants in helping teachers to improve

instruction in literacy, math and social studies. Additionally, school leaders use resources to support a week-long summer institute annually where teachers meet to review student performance data in order to plan for school improvement.

Positive relationships exist among staff and students. These promote the academic and personal development of students and encourage the professional development of the staff. Parents note that teachers “are into the students” and contact homes when there is a problem. A collaborative spirit pervades the school and this serves as a motivating factor for the community.

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.

There are a number of collaborative teams that identify their own needs, resulting in a culture of self-determination. Teachers appreciate opportunities to contribute to grade-level and instructional planning at weekly grade and department team meetings. They share best practices, give feedback on unit plans and discuss ways to meet individual student needs more successfully. These meetings have resulted in a more consistent approach to lesson and unit planning.

Consultants and coaches provide valuable support to teachers in English, math, social studies and special education that is resulting in suitable unit planning and improved instructional skills. New teachers benefit from supportive content-area mentoring by colleagues. The principal meets with teachers following informal walkthroughs and conducts some formal observations. In these cases, teachers receive structured feedback for improvement. However, the school has yet to individualize and specify goals and plans for the growth of all teachers that are linked to student achievement data.

One example of the weekly collaborative team meetings is the student-centered work designed by the science inquiry team. Team members examined science lab practices on each grade level and designed rubrics that incorporate the literacy developmental stages in the writing of lab reports. Currently, the team is developing teaching strategies to raise student learning.

The school has fostered valuable partnerships that are encouraging social and academic growth in a wide range of students. Directions for Youth promotes college readiness through visits by guest speakers and the Leadership Program provides enrichment activities for, and a social worker to support, over-age and under-credited students. In addition, Outward Bound expeditions and training expose some students to valuable experiences that enhance team building and leadership skills. Students are enthusiastic about applying this approach to yearly expositions in which they present to the community an aspect of their classroom work. The principal credits attendance outreach by youth development workers provided by the Integrated Service Center with increasing attendance for targeted students in the tenth grade.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The principal has a clear vision to improve student achievement through developing supportive practices and structures that are shared with staff and students. This vision helps to set a common direction for the school community as it moves through the change in leadership. In response, interim assessments and checkpoints are being developed to supplement summative information, such as the outcomes of Regents exams, to measure teacher and student progress.

Some teachers have devised creative examples of specific student-needs assessments and adjust their teaching accordingly. These include standards-based rubrics that provide focused feedback to help students improve their writing. However, the school does not have systemic processes with measurable goals and clearly defined interim markers against which to gauge student and teacher progress or make modifications to action plans, when required. This impedes both teacher and student growth.

School leaders use data to make effective organizational decisions, including reallocating blocks of time from core classes to increase the range of student electives. Additionally, reorganizing academic interventions and credit recovery programs have resulted in an increase in credits earned. Examples such as these show that the school community has a good capacity to identify key areas for growth.

Based on a reflective evaluation of the school, leaders have designed a three-year school development plan that includes a focus on examining data rigorously to differentiate goals for staff and students to accelerate student achievement.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Bronx Expeditionary Learning 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, 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.

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