



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

South Bronx Academy for Applied Media

Middle School 296

778 Forest Avenue

Bronx

NY 10456

Principal: Roshone Ault

Dates of review: November 20-21, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Lysbeth Bradley

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

South Bronx Academy for Applied Media (SBAAM) is a middle school with 252 scholars from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 31% Black, 67% Hispanic and 1% White scholars. The scholar body includes 12% English language learners and 31% special education scholars. Boys account for 49% of the scholars enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 87.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 96% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

SBAAM, as it is affectionately known by everyone in the school community, has come a long way since it opened with its first graduating class last summer. The journey has not always been smooth. In the first half of last academic year, staffing difficulties led to scholars often making less progress than expected. Backed up by several strategic appointments, the community has pulled together to improve the tone of the building significantly. Hallways and classrooms provide a stimulating learning environment with constant reminders of school and subject goals, and colorful graphic displays remind both staff and scholars how well they are doing in academics, attendance and behavior.

A proactive approach to the analysis and use of data underpins the principals' strategy for communicating high expectations to scholars and staff. With so many new teachers joining the school, the high degree of consistency in much of the school's work is testament to the truly collegial community that the principal has fostered. She believes that "accountability equals response-ability" and actively encourages teachers to get involved in whole school planning. Teachers feel very well supported by the hiring of a second dean and the zero tolerance approach to anyone ignoring the school code. Scholars recognize that the school is a safe and secure place to learn and appreciate the place set aside for reflection where they can spend a few minutes away from the classroom before things get out of hand. Professional development is at the heart of everything the school does. Each component of the plan derives from clear identification of need and links closely to school-wide, subject and individual goals. High quality monitoring, self-reflection, collaborative working and targeted support enable brand new and inexperienced teachers to develop their practice in a sustained way.

Action planning is strong, although not all plans specify interim goals. School goals and scholar achievement goals derive from a thorough analysis of prior achievement and a sharp assessment of potential progress. Teachers have recently set learning goals in English language arts, math, science and social studies, but have yet to adapt these for individuals and groups within the same class. There is now a rigorous and consistent approach to assessing scholars' work with accurate interpretation of rubrics. However, teachers rarely use this information to plan activities that provide the right level of challenge for scholars working at different levels within the same classroom. The principal has successfully shared her vision for raising achievement with the whole community and there are tangible signs of strong momentum. The school has yet to proceed to the next stage in its development by implementing applied media studies across the school in order to harness scholars' interests and make learning both active and relevant to the 21st century.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a strategic thinker and planner who has shared her vision for raising achievement with the whole community and is an excellent role model for the scholars and staff.
- The entire school community has worked successfully to raise the tone of the building and to provide a safe and stimulating learning environment where scholars' annotated work is carefully displayed in classrooms and hallways.
- The school consistently communicates high expectations in many tangible ways, including public displays of data on attendance, behaviour and achievement that leave staff and scholars in no doubt about what they are striving for.
- A well-developed culture of collaborative and collegial working is highly supportive of the all those who are new to teaching and promotes honest reflection and a willingness to learn from each other.
- There is a thoughtful approach to strategic planning for professional development that is thorough, coherent, differentiated and targeted on achieving school-wide and individual teacher goals.
- The school has made rapid progress in establishing a clear and congruent approach to grading work which provides scholars with diagnostic feedback derived from carefully designed rubrics that are closely aligned to State standards.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on the excellent start to goal setting by enabling all teachers to develop their practice in negotiating individual learning goals for scholars that define next steps in achieving long-term goals and involve scholars more actively in self-assessment.
- Establish a consistent approach to using formative assessments to plan activities that provide the right level of challenge for scholars working at different levels within the same classroom.
- Refine action planning by developing interim goals and benchmarks for all action plans that enable the principal and faculty to modify goals and objectives in a timely manner in order to optimize the impact of actions and to celebrate success along the way.
- Implement an action plan to realize the school's vision for using applied media studies as a vehicle for increasing relevance and real applications into the curriculum, extending the use of technology and actively engaging scholars in project-based 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 to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

In spite of staffing problems last year, the school tackled the areas for improvement from the previous Quality Review with vigor, both deepening and extending data management systems and structures. It has used its data action research team strategically, not only to successfully accelerate the progress of its targeted group of students, but as the means to provide regular staff development, customized to individual needs. Data is now part of every conversation and at everyone's fingertips.

Scholars know precisely what their monthly average points score is and what they are aiming for in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Monthly "state of the grade" meetings keep each grade fully informed of the attendance rate and the points score in each of these four subjects. Public displays comparing the success of each grade are proving to be motivating for both scholars and staff. Teachers have worked with both dedication and enthusiasm to establish a clear and congruent approach to grading work against detailed rubrics. Scholars benefit from regular, thorough and accurate assessment of their work that tells them the level they have achieved, what they have done well and what they need to work on. The school regularly communicates with parents through progress reports that explain their children's performance and progress in relation to individual achievement goals.

The school has been particularly successful in raising attendance levels. Although the school has set a goal of 90%, 2.5% above the rate for the last school year, scholars have maintained an average attendance of 91% for each of the first three months of the school year. This is a result of several highly effective and proactive strategies. There are regularly scheduled attendance meetings where deans, grade team leaders, guidance counselors and other key players analyze attendance in depth. The attendance coordinator makes daily phone calls to absent scholars. Scholars with the lowest attendance also have a teacher "buddy" who meets with them on a weekly basis. By analyzing patterns of poor attendance, the school has created a yearly calendar to plan interesting events when attendance is historically low.

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 principal and faculty communicate high expectations in many tangible ways, not least through explicit and published goals. Teachers, scholars and their parents know precisely what they are aiming for. There is a real determination among all constituents that scholars should aspire to challenging goals and work hard to achieve them.

There are strong links with individual scholar, class, grade and school-wide goals, as well as individual teacher goals. School-wide goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan derive from a close analysis of each scholar's prior achievement and their potential rate of progress over the year. The principal and faculty calculate how many students will need to increase a level in order to achieve each goal. Teachers understand how their actions impact on the school's ability to reach its goals. The principal works very closely with faculty to develop the plan and is increasingly reaching out to parents to encourage their active involvement.

Last year, each scholar received a goal monitoring binder where they keep track of their points score. This enables them to know if they are on track to achieve or exceed 80% in each of the four major subjects. Initially the principal has chosen strategically to go for depth rather than breadth in goal setting this year. In order to encourage teachers to set specific learning goals, every scholar has recently been given a Target 100 card for English language arts, math, science and social studies. Each card identifies six class goals linked to the unit of study so that scholars and parents know precisely what they are working on. These cards are intended to encourage scholars to reflect on their learning and to enable teachers to identify what students know and can do, and to pinpoint what they need to do to raise their score with the ultimate aim, a 100% bull's eye. It is too early to gauge impact, but the potential exists to involve scholars much more actively in self-assessment and for teachers to negotiate individual learning goals with 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 proficient.

All members of staff have worked closely with the principal to improve the quality of the learning environment. Much has been achieved in the past few months to establish a consistent approach to discipline; to improve the way scholars get along with each other and to enable both staff and scholars to concentrate on learning. Classrooms are well organized, with good quality displays of student work which shows attention to detail and celebrates individual achievement and endeavour. This approach flows into hallways where further displays in a wide range of subjects communicate the same high expectations and consistent approach to the grading of work.

The principal, grade leaders and all other members of faculty are effectively developing a curriculum tailored to the needs of their scholars. The initial emphasis was on ensuring that the school has the most suitable range of programs in English language arts and math because so many scholars start grade 6 with low levels of achievement. The data action research team has been instrumental in tackling weaknesses in math for lower and higher achieving students with demonstrable results in the State tests. In addition to the work in English language arts and math, the school has also ensured that scholars benefit from a well-planned curriculum in science and social studies. Teachers have met together to develop rubrics in all four subjects that align with State standards and which provide a sound basis against which to assess and level achievement.

The school has kept a close watch on patterns and trends in achievement data in order to make timely, strategic decisions about the effectiveness of programs and groupings. Slow progress in one cohort of scholars led to the formation of two single gender classes in grade last year. This arrangement has been continued into grade 8 based on positive outcomes for the targeted scholars. In response to the progress report and a thorough evaluation of the support for those students most at risk, the school has totally revamped its programs to provide greater rigor and stronger accountability.

While the school's organization has been effective in meeting the broad needs of most scholars within the school, teachers are rarely confident in using formative assessments to plan activities that take account of scholars' different levels of achievement or their preferred learning styles. Too many lessons involve too much teacher talk with few opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking skills, to solve problems or make decisions about the organization of their work. In those lessons where teachers focus on developing skills and understanding, rather than what they want scholars to know, there is more engagement. Strategies are thus explored and ideas and their solutions found especially where the teacher takes on a role of a facilitator to address misconceptions as they arise and sets challenges whereby thinking is extended through asking probing questions.

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.

Professional development is the bedrock on which the school improvement is founded. The principal has not been daunted by the large majority of teachers with less than five years' experience, and with a quarter of the staff new to teaching this year. She has been highly strategic in planning for professional development by providing a structured approach that meets the needs of a growing school while never losing sight of the necessity to provide targeted support for each individual. Collaboration is actively promoted and collegiality is of a high order. This is because of constant two-way communication with teachers building on the principal's direction and the principal listening carefully to their suggestions and confronting their concerns. She maintains that "straight talking leads to straight understanding" and encourages everyone to be open and honest.

The principal has invested heavily in her teachers by hiring staff developers in English language arts, math, science and social studies. In addition, a staff developer for behavior management has worked with teachers to ensure that any classroom management issues are tackled swiftly, enabling the teacher to focus on instruction. This twin strategy has paid dividends by ensuring consistency in curriculum development and in enabling teachers to develop their practice in a supportive but challenging environment. Teachers have the opportunity to work in a variety of teams to address subject, grade, group and whole school issues. Inter-visitations are actively encouraged and carefully structured to ensure maximum benefit to all participants.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is thorough, focused on priorities for improvement and effective in bringing about change and encouraging consistency of practice. The principal has produced a rubric for observations related to a school-wide initiative which provides highly specific feedback to teachers on their strengths and areas for development. Each teacher has met with the principal to set a scholar goal

and a personal goal. Formal observations relate closely to goals and are effective in evaluating the impact of targeted professional development activities.

The school has implemented a well-conceived and properly resourced guidance plan which has made a significant impact on scholar behaviour and attitudes in a short space of time, but is not yet fully embedded. The school works extremely well with Educators for Social responsibility and Partnership with Children to enable teachers to understand and address adolescent social and emotional development. The “calm, cool and collect” room set aside for scholars who need a short time away from the classroom to refocus is proving to be very successful in enabling them to develop self-discipline and personal awareness.

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 has shared her vision for the school’s development with all constituents and they support her wholeheartedly in working to raise student achievement. The school has established a regular monthly cycle to examine data relating to individual scholars, sub-groups, classes and grades in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Teachers meet in grades and departments to assess student performance and progress, to monitor student work and to review programs and curricular decisions. Wherever possible, members of faculty bring different perspectives to the meetings in order to take a holistic view of achievement and to determine what changes need to be made and why.

The principal is a clear thinker who leads by example. All action planning follows a similar structure with specific goals based on a thorough analysis of a wide range of information. Although all plans have interim checkpoints to ensure that things are on track, the absence of interim goals means that it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which agreed actions are making an impact on teaching and learning.

The school accurately identifies its strengths and weaknesses. Because school leaders and faculty use data well to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions, there is a clear understanding of why things work and why remedial action is needed. Teachers as well as school leaders understand “the big picture”. The principal is not afraid to take action when scholars’ progress is compromised by ineffective practice. Not only has the data action research team taken an extremely proactive approach to the information in the Learning Environment Survey, the school has acted with necessary swiftness and considerable thoughtfulness to the latest progress report. Evidence indicates that scholars are making good progress as a result of staffing changes, the introduction of new programs and the use of more rigorous systems to hold intervention staff to account.

The school has taken its first steps in introducing aspects of applied media into the curriculum. The school has reversed the downward trend in progress but has yet to implement a timely action plan for school-wide implementation of applied media studies, extending the use of technology to grab students’ interests and to make learning both relevant and challenging.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: South Bronx Academy for Applied Media	△	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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

Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed
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