

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Bronx Early College Academy

Middle School 324

**3223 independence Avenue
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: John Barnes

Dates of review: April 29 - 30, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Salvador A. Fernandez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Early College Academy is a middle school with 188 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 29% Black, 67% Hispanic, 2% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 78.5% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The new executive principal communicates high expectations by encouraging professional collaboration, developing curricula, and strengthening instructional practices to increase student achievement. The school has made great progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report. The principal, in a short period, has created structures that support a culture of mutual trust and respect among teachers and students and have resulted in a positive learning environment. There is a clear vision for the school that is focused on improving student achievement. School leaders, faculty and students all agree that a nurturing and caring culture has blossomed this year leading to the students learning needs being better addressed. New structures are attributed to the work of the new principal being extremely energetic and student focused. Parents and students are highly supportive of these structures and praise the work of principal and staff. As one student stated, "Teachers are better prepared to help us." Hallways are filled with displays of student work and student accomplishments, such as attendance and academic achievements, which promote clear expectations and a positive learning environment. Classrooms are aesthetically organized to promote an environment conducive to learning.

School leaders and faculty have made good progress in collecting and recording data by developing a teacher assessment notebook where teachers keep formative and summative data to track student progress in content subjects. Teachers are deepening their work from collecting to analyzing data to inform instruction and planning and set grade, class and individual learning goals. School leaders and faculty are working at enhancing teachers' and students' ability to jointly create individual student learning goals that include interim benchmarks with specific timeframes to strategically monitor and evaluate student progress in all core subjects. However, the work is at the beginning stages and it is too early to gauge an impact on student outcomes.

Teachers meet weekly by departments to plan lessons tailored to meet their students' needs. School leaders are continuing to empower teachers during weekly common planning meetings to share best practices, look at student work and make revisions to curriculum to improve student outcomes. Teachers recognize the need to further develop their ability to plan units that are interdisciplinary to ensure students make connections among core subjects. School leaders and faculty all agree that additional professional development is necessary to deepen the work for teachers to deliver differentiated instruction and activities that will engage, challenge and motivate students at all achievement levels.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new executive principal is well respected by staff and communicates high expectations for students' achievement that are clearly understood by the entire school community.
- The school has an effective system in place for collecting and recording formative and summative data to track student progress.
- There are structures in place that promote a strong culture of mutual trust and respect among teachers and students which results in a positive environment conducive to learning.
- The school has strong partnerships with outside organizations that provide exposure to real life experience for students and help prepare them for college.
- Additional resources are allocated for specialized support staff to ensure that the social and academic needs of students are met.
- The school has an effective system to communicate with families about student progress and attendance and families are positive about the work of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand on the structures in place that enable teachers and students to jointly create individual student learning goals that include interim benchmarks with specific timeframes to monitor and evaluate student progress in all core subjects.
- Continue to empower teachers to use regular meetings to share best practices, look at student work and make revisions to curriculum to improve student outcomes.
- Build on existing professional development opportunities to include deepening the work on differentiated instruction and activities that will engage, challenge and motivate students at all achievement levels.
- Further develop teachers' ability to plan interdisciplinary links that reinforce students' learning by enabling them to make connections between core subjects.

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 proficient.

School leaders have implemented a good system for teachers to collect and record formative and summative data. During weekly department meetings teachers scrutinize the assessment data as well as attendance and behavior data to inform instructional practices and tailor curriculum to need to engage students in learning. Teachers are deepening their work in analyzing formative and summative data to carefully plan lessons and develop flexible groupings that engage and challenge students in English, math, science and social studies and improve student outcomes. Teachers regularly evaluate student work and are tracking student progress three times a year. The school is still in the developmental stage in working on the interpretation of data to identify patterns and trends and, although making good progress, the systems are not yet sufficiently established to show an impact on student outcomes.

School leaders and faculty do a very good job of communicating with families about student progress, attendance and behavior concerns. Progress reports are sent home between report cards keeping parents informed of their child's progress. There are monthly meetings with Lehman College faculty which effectively keep parents informed of early college opportunities for their child. A helpful, monthly, "Brunch with Barnes" provides parents with a forum where they can articulate concerns with the principal and are provided with updates on organizational decisions that will impact on their child's education. Parents are very pleased with the work of the executive principal and staff, especially regarding the climate of trust and respect that now exists at 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 well developed.

The new executive principal is well respected and admired by the staff, students and parents. He communicates high expectations about student achievement that are clearly understood by the entire school community and have become embedded in the schools' rituals and routines. Hallway displays with clear expectations and examples of student work promote a culture of success that is conducive to learning. School leaders and faculty all adhere to the guidelines set forth in Project BECA, a whole school strategic improvement action plan based on the Breakthrough Model. This has embedded rituals and routines throughout the school and has produced a nurturing, caring and reflective environment which incorporates planning and setting goals for school culture. Uniformity among classrooms is clearly evident.

Since the previous review the school has developed an excellent structure for setting school-wide goals in all core subjects, as included in the Comprehensive Educational

Plan. The school leadership team is conducting a series of needs assessments to start the revision process for next year. In addition to school-wide goals, school leaders and faculty have an effective system in place to generate departmental, grade, and class learning goals. Teachers meet weekly to go over formative and summative data to set these goals and make revisions as needed. During department meetings teachers go over subject specific learning, plan curriculum and tailor lessons for students to meet or exceed department and class goals. Teachers also discuss attendance and behavior data which ensures that no student goes unnoticed and are all on track towards meeting their goals. The use of student planners to write unit goals and share with parents has been well received by students and parents. However, teachers and students have not yet developed individual student learning goals with time-framed interim benchmarks against which to measure progress in all core subjects.

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.

Since the previous review and last year’s Learning Environment Surveys the school has developed a strong culture of mutual trust and respect. This can be attributed to the new executive principal’s relentless work on ensuring a student-focused culture that fosters respect for all constituents. The school’s healthy climate provides students with a calm, safe, invigorating and nurturing environment that promotes social and academic growth for students, parents and staff. As stated by one student, “Teachers make learning fun for us to meet our goals.” Teachers enjoy coming to work as evident by the “volunteer new teacher town hall” held on Thursdays and Fridays before classes begin. This provides an effective forum for teachers to share best practices with school leaders and for the administration to provide updates about organizational and instructional decisions. Teachers and students feel well supported by the administration. Students acknowledge the high level of trust and respect in the school. School leaders have developed an environment that is conducive to learning so students enjoy coming to school.

School leaders, consultants and faculty meet weekly by department to analyze summative and formative data and tailor the curriculum so that it best meets the needs of their students. The staff have begun to shift the curricular development from an external to an internal model, providing for more ownership. The executive principal has been extremely supportive of the process, recognizing that the school is at the initial stages but is progressing at a good pace. School leaders have provided teachers with time and support from consultants, which are ensuring that the transition goes smoothly.

Teachers regularly share best practices that lead to improving student outcomes. Teachers and students are extremely comfortable with the use of subject rubrics, aligned to State standards, for self-assessment. Procedures and routines are well established and the delivery of classroom instruction is consistent across the school. At present, however, teachers do not plan lessons with interdisciplinary links. As a result they do not consistently enable students to make the connections between the core subjects to reinforce their skills and understanding and further accelerate their learning.

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 school has strong partnerships with outside organizations which provide support and promote positive academic and social development for students. Students participate in Lehman College courses at an early point which permits them to acquire up to sixty college credits by the time they graduate from high school. The school also has a partnership with Learning Leaders which has trained a cohort of parents to become an integral part of school community, assisting with clerical matters and helping to maintain a positive school tone in the lunchroom. External consultants work hands-on with teachers, providing invaluable training. School leaders and faculty welcome the contributions of all these organizations, which positively impact the academic, social and personal growth of their school community.

Professional Teaching Standards were introduced by the current administration in September 2008. Formal classroom observations are aligned to the standards and provide teachers with effective constructive feedback that is improving instructional practices. Informal learning walks provide teachers with immediate feedback on the impact of instruction on student learning. Classroom observation also provides additional information to inform the allocation of resources for specialized support for modifying curriculum and improving instructional practices. Professional collaboration is strongly encouraged and supported by the school leaders. Teachers meet weekly by department, as well as new teacher meetings with the school leaders that all teachers can attend. Additionally, consultants meet with individual teachers and model teaching strategies in their content subjects to strengthen instructional practices. These meetings, which started this school year under the tenure of the new executive principal, effectively enable teachers to analyze formative and summative data, go over curriculum maps, look at student work, plan lessons and have discussions about students within their grade. Teachers welcome these initiatives because they have strengthened relationships and enabled them to set professional goals. They regularly use the meetings to make connections, share best practices and learn from each other and the consultants to improve their instructional practices. Nevertheless, school leaders and faculty are not yet sufficiently skilled in planning consistently rigorous differentiated lessons and activities that will engage, challenge and motivate students at all achievement levels.

The newly structured Inquiry Team is focusing on 15 students that did not make one year's progress on last year's State math test. They found that the major areas of weakness were in process and communication. The team works well together and has chosen the strategy of communication for the target group, using a math journal for students to explain and define how they came up with their answers. They administered a baseline test in October to assess the students' entry level. In March students were assessed again and showed improvement. Teachers school-wide are replicating this strategy which is improving student learning in all grades.

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 creation of the whole-school improvement action plan has created uniformity throughout the school community. There are three interim checkpoints which enable the school leadership to assess regularly the impact of the plans, instructional practices, curriculum and organizational decisions on improving student achievement. School leaders and faculty are committed to ensuring that everyone is held accountable and to providing students with a well-rounded educational experience. School leaders have developed a system that provides faculty with clear expectations about the importance of ongoing professional collaborations to share best practices, analyze student work and make revisions to curriculum and instruction in order to improve student outcomes.

School leaders and faculty carefully monitor student progress and are quick to adjust plans, and curriculum to meet changing needs. For example, the focus on maintaining a positive, caring and nurturing climate conducive to learning was informed by the Learning Environment Surveys. Similarly, the Progress Report highlighted the need to maintain the progress of the high achievers in math. Acuity is used effectively to identify specific skill needs of students and modify lessons, which helps improve student outcomes in all grades. School leaders use frequent formal and informal observations and walkthroughs to assess the impact of instructional practices and the curriculum on student learning.

The principal communicates a clear vision for the school, focused on improving student achievement, which is understood and shared by all members of the school community. This has led to the creation of a nurturing, reflective and caring culture that is student focused, with a commitment to enabling all students to achieve as highly as possible.

School name: Bronx Early College Academy	△	➤	✓	+
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.							
<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