

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

The Bronx Guild High School

High School 452

**1980 Lafayette Ave.
Bronx**

NY 10473

Principal: Sam Decker

Dates of review: December 8-9, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx Guild High School has an enrolment of 418 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 35.2% Black, 60.2% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3.6% Asian. The student body includes 9.2% English language learners and 21.7% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 76%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school has a strong commitment to project-based learning that reflects the challenges and activities of the real world. The principal leads the school well in the promotion of this vision, which is shared by a hard-working staff, who are creative in supporting project assignments. The positive relationships that exist between students and staff very effectively complement the collaborative work of the school. The rapport that has been established helps to promote a productive learning environment.

The school monitors the achievement and progress of its students through its portfolio of project-based assignments. Crew leaders have a clear analysis of the specific needs of students through comprehensive conferencing procedures. The individualized approach results in effective support for particular groups of students, such those with special education need and English language learners. The profile of progress in developing competencies and skills in performing arts is not sufficiently detailed. The situation of one teacher working continuously with a small group of students is a powerful context for promoting an open communication with parents. Parents are kept well informed about the progress of their children through conferencing and a website. Surveys of parental opinion show that they greatly value the developing mutual respect and trust created between students and staff.

The collaborative planning associated with project development and subsequent teaching is a strong feature of the school. The creation of curriculum maps, assessment rubrics and action planning are a reflection of this shared expertise. However, the coherence of action plans is undermined through insufficient identification of specific responsibilities and progress checkpoints. Crew leaders play a central role in conveying to students and parents awareness of high expectations about attendance, behavior and academic performance. .

The commitment to project-based learning is stimulating and motivating for both students and teachers. Currently some projects have insufficient emphasis on math analysis and quantitative reasoning. Professional development effectively promotes the schools aims and objectives. Extensive external partnerships and internship projects encourage students' interest and learning about real life experiences. Organizational changes have improved the review procedures in the school, but whole-school data analysis of trends in achievement is not sufficiently comprehensive.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The positive, close relationship between students and teachers promotes a supportive learning environment for students.
- There are very effective systems for identifying teaching and learning goals for individual students which gives purpose and direction to their work.
- Professional development and individual support for staff from coaches, senior staff and mentors make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the school.
- The school has developed innovative, challenging curriculum through project-based assignments and internships, which motivates students and successfully engages them.
- The extensive network of partnerships with community colleges and the local community, including business links, significantly enhances learning opportunities for students.
- The school has created a strong collaborative culture, which promotes self-reflection among staff, sharing of professional expertise and commitment to the aims and values of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Use the substantial database on student achievement to identify trends in progress on whole-school issues.
- Make action planning more robust by specifying interim benchmarks and responsibilities so that the monitoring of progress in relation to initiatives has more coherence.
- Ensure student projects have sufficient rigor to meet external standards, particularly with regard to math and quantitative reasoning.
- Build upon good practice to develop profiles of progress in skills and competencies in the performing arts.

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.

The school's data collecting processes effectively support a framework of individualized student project-based work. The analysis of this data is regularly conducted by staff through grade team meetings. This collaborative process is particularly productive for monitoring ongoing progress and internship projects. However, in some subjects, emerging skills and competencies are not recorded systematically, such as in the performing arts. The extensive data on achievement is not routinely analysed to identify trends over time in relation to whole school objectives. The school gives specific attention to the formulation of data with regard to students with special education needs and English language learners. The learning plans that exist for each student are appropriately informed by NYSELAT scores and individualized education plan goals. Students are making good progress because of the accommodations that are being made to reflect their learning styles.

The school compiles an individual portfolio of personal information, assessment outcomes and learning goals for each student. An advisor (crew leader) regularly updates this detailed information. The crew leader remains with the same group of students throughout the whole period of their stay at the school and, in consequence, develops a broad picture of an individual student's progress. The portfolio is appropriately enhanced by anecdotal evidence in addition to conferencing notes and suggestions for improvement. This data file forms the basis of extensive discussions with parents at conference meetings. These summative assessments not only identify success in meeting targets but also elaborate next steps in learning. Parents are not only appreciative of the extent and accessibility to information about the progress of their children, but also of the opportunities the school has given to them to be able track progress. For example, parents are able to receive a synopsis of grades via the school's website.

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 personalized approach to learning provides an effective context for identifying each student's learning steps and subsequent goals. Crew leaders are increasingly able to pay particular attention to students' learning styles and work products. The strategy of a teacher remaining with the same cohort of students enables them to appropriately plan instruction, interventions and assessment. The sharing of data within separate institutes has informed more general plans with regard to increasing the focus on credit accumulation and an emphasis in quantitative reasoning in project work. These

collaborative discussions effectively form the basis of the composition of the school's Comprehensive Education Plan.

The school has developed a coherent strategy for discussing, reviewing and adjusting the learning goals of its students. This is reflected in a project development process, core subject assessments and the formulation of a learning plan. Crew leaders effectively conference with individual students about the planning of their projects, highlighting essential questions which need to be addressed and timeframes for completion. The process gives an appropriate focus to the incorporation of literacy goals in the project as well as meeting performance expectations in relation to New York State standards.

Designed projects are effectively incorporated into individualized learning plans that are posted onto an online, public system, facilitating the tracking of progress. Parents have access to the system and, in consequence, have a good opportunity to be meaningfully involved in their child's education. Parents value the individual responsibility of one crew leader for the education of their children. The process significantly enhances communication between families and the school. The regular presentations of learning and parent conferences are well-established mediums for establishing expectations about learning and celebrating success.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has an innovative approach to curriculum delivery through sole emphasis on project-based assignments and an internship project. This individualized approach affords significant flexibility in meeting the specific needs and interests of students. All projects reflect an inquiry process and are appropriately aligned to State standards through the school's performance expectations. In general, there is insufficient emphasis given to mathematical analysis and quantitative reasoning in projects. The school adopts a differentiated approach to project completion. For example, specific criteria and rubrics are modified according to performance level, so as to allow time for completion and meet performance expectations. The school has effectively introduced a variety of group projects. For example, all grade 9 students complete the "Who Am I?" project that innovatively introduces the inquiry process through self-reflection and personal history. Positive outcomes of this development are evidenced in students' learning plans through improved attendance, less attrition and better credit accumulation. The school is mindful of providing appropriate challenge for high-achieving students and, in consequence, successfully promotes involvement in college classes. The requirement that all students complete a rigorous internship project also ensures relevance of learning to the real world. The extensive links which the school has developed with relevant businesses and colleges provide the supportive context for this work.

The school uses its budget well to promote the learning needs of students and staff. The hiring and deployment of specialists in literacy, math and science has had a significant impact on providing support for both students and teachers. The school has established greater coherence in the curriculum through the creation of long-term literacy and math maps. The increased support for science has positively promoted more engagement in lab investigations, which has resulted in a greater science orientation in some projects.

A strong feature of the school's culture is the very positive relationships that exist between students and staff. The structure of one teacher facilitating the educational and emotional progress of a relatively small group of students (on average 15 students in each crew) provides a very substantive basis for building mutual trust and respect. This is very successfully achieved. The significant support students receive is reflected in the purposeful and motivated engagement student's show in their work.

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's commitment to individualized student learning is also reflected in a similar approach to the professional development of staff. The school devotes a regular weekly session to staff training. An inquiry team model is successfully used to engage grade teams in discussions and analysis of trends and data to identify teaching and learning needs. For example, staff members have discussed how to use literacy grades to identify literacy goals for students. On an individual basis, the learning specialists provide staff with focused support on content to ensure there is appropriate challenge in projects. The creation of the role of instructional coaches has effectively provided opportunities for experienced staff to work in a supportive and facilitating capacity with individual staff members. Teachers confirm that they get informative and helpful feedback as a result of monitoring visits. A carefully structured mentoring program supports new staff well. Team collaboration ensures that they are part of ongoing dialogue with an experienced colleague about how they can work effectively in an innovative environment.

The organizational systems based upon the collaborative arrangements within grades promote staff development well. The common planning related to project development in school, but also with internship site mentors, helps generate productive discussions about suitable learning opportunities for students. The staff work well with their crews to ensure there is a coherent learning plan in place to promote a student's academic and personal growth. This delegated responsibility to staff is indicative of the principal's commitment to developing leadership within the school. In this way he is effectively building the capacity of the school to sustain its development.

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 school, through its emphasis on instructional support and collaborative procedures, has effectively created a process that systematically identifies strengths and development areas. Instructional coaches effectively work with crew leaders to ensure an appropriate alignment in project work of skills, real-world learning and academic achievement. Grade team meetings provide an appropriate context for focusing on best practices, looking at student work and revising plans. This process successfully highlighted the problem that some Regents prep students were having difficulty in structuring their essays. As a result, a literacy specialist was able to provide individual support for those students.

Crew leaders use a range of data and interim checkpoints to monitor progress. A central element is the use of the individualized learning plan, which provides the context for individual conferencing about progress in relation to projects. Students are encouraged to be active partners in this process, so as to identify resource issues and completion dates. The centralizing of assessment outcomes through a crew leader portfolio provides a comprehensive array of data on performance levels, student progress and issues pertinent to the whole crew. It provides an effective basis for the school to be able to identify research issues and next steps in students' learning. The use of common rubrics designed to assess the outcomes of projects and presentations is a very effective component of this analysis and review.

Whole-school data is routinely analyzed, but sometimes not in sufficient detail to identify trends, such as credit accumulation for specific groups. Conversely the analysis of low attendance data brought a proactive response with a new attendance plan and more resources allocated to address the issue. This has successfully resulted in an increase of 5% in current attendance levels.

In general, decisions to promote improvement are appropriately reflected in action plans, which guide the work of institutes and grades. These groups hold regular discussions to reflect upon the progress of action plans and whether subsequent data indicates that the school should revise these plans so as to address student need. The elaboration of these action plans does not identify interim checkpoints or specific responsibilities so that progress can be coherently monitored. The professionally informed discussions that take place have created an increased assurance among staff on the use of data to support student learning. Staff members are self-reflective and proactive in enabling students to produce challenging projects. A hard-working, dedicated staff shares the principal's vision and commitment to a personalized program of education for students.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Bronx Guild 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>	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