

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice

Middle – High School X505

244 East 163rd Street

Bronx

NY 10451

Principal: Meisha S. Ross-Porter

Dates of review: November 20 - 21, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Joel T. DiBartolomeo

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice is a middle/high school with 594 students from grade 7 through grade 12. The school population comprises 37.2% Black, 57.9% Hispanic, 1.2% White, 0.8% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.9% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 38.9% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61.1%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 94.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 61.7% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

Under the leadership of the principal and her able administrative team, the school has established a foundation for on-going improvement and greater student achievement in the future. Essential to her plans to “stage and phase” the different facets of the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan, is the principal’s continued nurturing of a collaborative educational community, centered on trust, respect, and professionalism. Teachers, parents and students enjoy the access they have to school leaders.

Following a review of a variety of school indicators, the school changed some of its programs and organizational structures at the beginning of the year. Other changes are just starting or are planned. It is too early to see if they have had an impact yet. A school-wide initiative begun this year is “Snapgrades” that provides parents and students with ready access to teachers’ grade books electronically. Goal setting for students has recently begun in advisory class, where students set goals for each of their core subjects. The school identifies students in danger of failing and directs them to extra support programs. Teachers have yet to use interim assessment data consistently to create short- and long-term performance goals and plans that include the identification of next steps for learning. The school’s goals are not sufficiently disaggregated by subgroups, grades and subjects.

The school makes excellent use of its resources to secure properly certified staff, purchase materials, equip classrooms with technology and provide a large variety of supports to students. The school offers students a good number of theme related, honors level and advanced placement courses. While there exist extraordinary examples of accommodation for students with disabilities, classroom instruction is not effectively differentiated to serve well the diverse needs and learning styles of all students.

Teachers, coaches and school administrators are using the California Standards for the Teaching Professions (CSTP) to develop a common understanding of evidence-based teaching practices and to develop teaching capacity. Teachers enthusiastically participate in one-on-one collaborative conversations with administrators. However, data is not used as a component to this process and therefore teaching practices are disassociated from their impact on learning.

What the school does well

- School leaders and staff enjoy extremely positive relationships that support a productive, collaborative learning environment.
- The school uses a diverse range of data sources that allows it to identify student performance and needs.
- Following an evaluation of its programs, organizational structure and supports for teaching and learning, the school has begun to implement strategies to use data more efficiently to monitor progress and to raise student performance.
- Formal and informal classroom observations and developmental feedback are making a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Parents and students all value and appreciate the school's open door policy and the educational opportunities and customized supports available to them.

What the school needs to improve

- Set and share with students and parents long term performance targets in English language arts, math and other subjects so that progress is monitored and shared.
- Ensure that all teachers use pertinent available data to set measurable learning goals with timeframes and benchmarks for each student, which clearly identify the skills and knowledge required to achieve them.
- Continue to develop the analysis and understanding of data, so all teachers are confident and competent in its use to improve students' learning.
- Further develop a system to disaggregate and analyze subgroup data to identify differences and then make provisions to address them.
- Use data to set and review measurable interim- and long-term goals for all subgroups and grades to determine impact of instructional decisions and to improve student achievement.

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 uses multiple sources of data to identify student performance adding understanding in English language arts, math and art. The school has identified individual "radar" students whose lack of progress has targeted them for close monitoring. In addition, the school disaggregates and analyzes sub-group data to formulate plans of intervention to address students' needs. The school is aware that there exists no established routine for generating and analyzing student data at the skill and sub-skill level. Therefore, tracking student progress in all core subject areas and monitoring the impact of instructional strategies are not precise activities.

Approximately 90% of all middle school students transition into the high school division each year. Because there is no provision to ensure that knowledge of student performance was transmitted in the process, teachers began the year having to use their own diagnostics to ascertain student performance baselines. The variability in both process and product that results from the idiosyncratic nature of these assessments makes it difficult for this data to be aggregated beyond the classroom level. As a result, school leaders cannot make sound judgments about the general qualities of what students know and can do and where to place emphasis in the instructional program.

The school reports student grades with teacher comments about performance using Snapgrades, an online grading system. One student described Snapgrades as a "check-up from the neck-up". The system gives parents and students regular access to information related to classroom performance, attendance and behavior. In addition, the system provides parents with the most updated information in order for them to track their child's academic journey towards graduation. However, not all teachers identify students' short-term goals nor is information specific enough to permit students to understand or articulate their next learning steps. While the school administers Acuity assessments, students and parents have not been involved consistently in conversations related to the results.

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 school makes good use of collaborative settings to involve parents and staff to craft its Comprehensive Educational Plan. The analysis of data that informs the plan does not include the disaggregating of student subgroups, grades or subjects. As a result, the long-term school goals and plans for the current year do not address specific areas of inadequate performance or discrete categories of students for whom results are poor. Teachers are in the beginning stages of formulating learning goals with timeframes and

benchmarks for students. As a result determining the on-going impact of instruction is not possible.

The culture of the school serves to support the communication of high expectations for attendance, behavior and academics to students and their families and high work standards for staff. The school notifies parents of student absence when it occurs and has realized an increase from 88% to 94.7% in its attendance rate over the past school year. Students in danger of failing have access to additional support and such efforts have contributed to the school's improvement in Progress Report grades and scores. Student contact with college advisors is carefully monitored as students are supported through the college admissions process. Parents support the school enthusiastically, but are not fully aware of diploma requirements and the demands of State assessments.

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.

To enhance the quality of student academic engagement in the learning process, the school utilizes the Atlas Learning Communities program. The school's curriculum satisfies all City and State requirements and offers students a variety of diploma pathways. Students have available to them a good number of honors and Advanced Placement courses. Additional supports are available for students who need them. Attributable to high failure rates in some courses, the school has elected to offer less rigorous courses to students as alternatives. This change in policy has resulted in higher course passing rates. Unexpected outcomes of these changes are student perceptions of their experience in "regular" courses verses that found in "honors" courses. Students report that they are more likely to work in groups, do hands-on activities, be motivated to work harder and have more "fun" when in more challenging courses.

Parents of two students with special needs, reported that the school's responsiveness as "tremendous" and "beyond my dreams." Their children have progressed with their classmates and excelled. However, differentiated support is not secured in all classrooms, as many staff members are not confident and competent in the analysis and use of data to improve students' learning. As well, they do not vary materials, texts, activities and assessments sufficiently to result in classroom instruction that meets the diverse needs and learning styles of all students.

The school's efforts to involve staff in collaborative work settings and empower students have had the good result of building trust, respect and positive attitudes towards learning. Parents and students all value and appreciate the school's open door policy, the sense of "family" that exists and the educational opportunities and customized supports available to them.

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.

The school has implemented the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) as an evidenced-based framework through which to view teaching and learning. Teacher mentors, coaches and assistant principals work together to provide good support to both new and experienced teachers. School leaders conduct regular classroom observations and the subsequent developmental feedback as well as administrative support for classroom inter-visitations is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. One-on-one feedback opportunities for teachers or “instructional intensives” support a mutual responsibility for teacher development. Teachers select their own performance targets from among the different elements of the CSTP as part of the goal setting process. School leaders have made the decision to focus on process and relationship building and delay the use of data to drive greater alignment of these practices with personal development. As such, the school cannot reliably correlate, or link through cause and effect, the relationships between teaching practices and their impact on student learning.

Each grade team has selected five students to monitor closely and for whom it will create short and long-term goals and learning plans. This approach to the investigation of the conditions in which the targeted students learn includes the evaluation of change strategies in regular classroom contexts. On the other hand, the school’s two inquiry projects situate the change strategy outside of the regular classroom, diminishing the potential to reform classroom practice.

The school makes excellent use of its budget to provide for a range of instructional settings, special licensed staff, two data specialists and classroom resources. The student support team, college advisor, social worker, guidance counselor and deans work together to support students in both in all school settings. As a result, there are high levels of care, trust and respect among students and the adults in the school.

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.

Through analysis of a variety of external and internal accountability reports, the school took a closer look at its programs, organizational structure, curriculum, and support for the teaching and learning process. Subject area departments now create or revamp curriculum maps quarterly. In addition, there have been changes in the middle school schedule and the creation of extra help venues such as a Regents prep class, tutoring sessions and a Saturday Academy. Nonetheless, the consistent use of baseline and periodic assessments to measure effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students is not secure. Therefore, the school cannot accurately monitor the progress and performance of individual students and subgroups.

The school’s self-evaluation represents an accurate description and evaluation of the school’s work. The school’s vision for engaging and rigorous classroom instruction with adults taking “ownership of kids” provides a target that is clear to all staff and one towards which they aspire. The Comprehensive Educational Plan incorporates four key components of the school’s vision and translates them into action plans to be implemented over the course of the year. However, the school does not systematically use data to set and review measurable interim- and long-term goals for all subgroups, subjects and grades. As a result, it cannot measure the impact of particular instructional decisions on performance.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice	△	➤	✓	+
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