

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

The Bronx Laboratory School

High School 265

800 East Gun Hill Road

Bronx

NY 10467

Principal: Christopher Lagares

Dates of review: January 8-9, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Doris Unger

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx Laboratory School is a high school with 440 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 41% Black, 55% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 86.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

This year, the Bronx Laboratory High School will graduate its third class under the leadership of newly appointed principal. With the support of generous partner organizations and its own internal organization, the school has been able to successfully support the academic, social and emotional needs of its students. These organizations have sponsored the annual freshman orientation camping trip since the school opened seven years ago, provided mentors, credit recovery opportunities, and pro bono legal services to Bronx Laboratory students and their families.

The school community has developed curriculum with a shared vision and a focus towards meeting student needs and accelerating learning for a wide range of subgroups by consistently using data to set goals and to inform and modify instructional practices. The Comprehensive Educational Plan and the school's professional development plan reflect a high priority to preparing daily lessons that are differentiated, relevant, and engaging, and have clear learning outcomes matched to grade level expectations. Good progress has been made in differentiating learning, but the school recognizes that practice is not fully consistent across classrooms and not all teachers use technology well enough to take account of different learning styles.

The Bronx Laboratory School is a dedicated learning community. It promotes and effectively encourages professional collaboration by enabling full participation of teacher teams who meet regularly to analyze data, compare student work, identify strengths and weaknesses in pedagogy, and revisit and revise action plans. Teachers contribute to curriculum maps on google.docs, effectively sharing best practices and productively budgeting their time while eliminating scheduling issues. However, the school does not maximize opportunities for teachers to play a full part in decision-making because team leaders are not yet supported effectively to realize their capacity for leadership.

The principal has collected the e-mail addresses of virtually every parent or guardian, allowing for the immediate dissemination of information and an additional venue for direct communication with the family. Information regarding student achievement is available in real time. However, there is more work to do in enlisting parents to engage in the decision making process and in re-creating the parent association. The school is committed to preparing students beyond the requirements of a New York City high school diploma. The goal of The Bronx Laboratory School is to ensure their success in college by providing the academic, social, and emotional skills necessary to participate in the academic arena. The school tracks successes of its graduates and uses the data to formulate curricular changes in advisory classes that further refine the way it prepares students for college and to maximize the achievements of each and every student.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has created a culture of trust and positive attitudes towards learning that supports the academic, personal, and professional growth of students and all staff members.
 - The school has engaged in a thorough analysis of ARIS data, results of the Learning Environment Survey, and Progress Report data to compose a Comprehensive Educational Plan and professional development plan that explicitly identify school-wide goals and complementary action plans to achieve those goals. The school enlists the help of partner organizations who work with students and their families to achieve youth development goals. Professional development is purposefully designed to equip teachers with the tools that maximize student outcomes.
 - Students state that they appreciate the concern and dedication of staff members who support their learning in and out of the classroom. The Bronx Laboratory School staff maintains close contact with students and their families via mail, telephone calls, and biweekly progress reports and through their advisory class. Students feel that this family atmosphere has a positive influence on their attitudes towards learning and helps them maintain a focus on their own academic success.
- All teachers are actively engaged in structured professional collaborations and teams that promote the development of shared understandings and foster the improvement of student outcomes.
 - All teachers are members of at least one inquiry team. Many have leadership roles as grade team leaders or content area leaders who facilitate discussion around the development of curriculum. They are successful in identifying and comparing instructional strategies and in examining student work with a focus on building coherence between what is taught, how it is taught and, when necessary, how it is re-taught, resulting in improved student achievement.
 - Teacher teams take the lead in developing subject-specific “gateways”, an assessment tool used by each department to further ensure coherence between what students need to know and what they should be able to do. Consequently, students are gaining a clear understanding of the roadmap to achieving mastery across subjects in a focused manner.
- Professional learning activities are purposeful and there are multiple opportunities for teachers to share best practices and content expertise.
 - School leaders, mentors, and coaches provide teachers with targeted and differentiated support. A log of formal and informal observations serve as an ongoing record of classrooms visited. It also serves to ensure that teachers are consistently provided with feedback and suggested strategies that elevate the level of instruction across grades and subjects, leading to greater student engagement and achievement.

- Teachers work collaboratively in a non-threatening environment with the goal of improving student outcomes and teacher pedagogy. The combination of teacher intervisitations, the consistent sharing of best practices, and opportunities for teacher team leaders to develop facilitation skills builds capacity within the school that further supports student learning.
- The school uses data extremely well to direct and drive the design of rigorous and engaging curricula that align to State standards and effectively increase student capacity for college readiness.
 - The school has successfully modified school-wide curricula following thorough analysis of alumni data. The revised curriculum provides activities that require higher order thinking skills and reinforcing habits of mind. These elements are embedded across grade levels and subject areas with increased attention to the needs of English language learners, special education students, and those in the lowest third. Students have multiple opportunities to practice transferable skills, enabling them to be successful in high school and prepared for the challenges of college.
- The school collaborates very successfully with community-based organizations in integrating youth development services and other supports that accelerate students' academic and personal growth.
 - The principal is proactive in establishing and maintaining partnerships to support students and their families. Students and their families are provided with legal advice about housing and immigration law, including how it relates to applying to or paying for college. Medical and mental health services are available, and referrals are made as needed. Students take advantage of opportunities provided by Community-based organizations to attend off-site classes, such as a semester abroad and attending summer school at private school outside of New York City. Consequently, the students benefit from the exposure to a "campus" experience while earning or recovering credits towards graduation.
 - Teachers use Google.docs as a platform to share materials and strategies to enhance curriculum that provides students with opportunities for social and emotional learning within content areas resulting in greater social awareness, increased tolerance, and the development of social skills needed to be successful in and out of school.
- The extensive organization and analysis of data inform goal setting and action planning resulting in improved student outcomes.
 - The school analyzes a wide range of data, including scholarship reports, the Progress Report, Quality Review, the Learning Environment Survey and ARIS to establish a clear picture of school-wide needs. As a result, the Comprehensive Educational Plan and professional development plan contain highly focused goals and action plans that address organizational and instructional practices which may have previously hindered the acceleration of student learning. School leaders effectively communicate these goals with all constituents and organize them in "buckets" so that they are easily understood and supported by the entire school community, resulting in accelerated student learning.

- Teachers work with individual students to develop reflective practices so that students learn to access their own progress and articulate next steps throughout the year.
 - Teachers utilize student self-evaluation forms, a useful tool that engages students in self-reflection about the quality of their work and informs them about what they know and what they still need to learn. Having this information empowers students. Consequently, they take ownership of in their learning and become active participants in striving for improvement.
 - The school uses multiple web-based systems that allow students and their families to access details about student progress. Students and parents like these systems because they can monitor progress regularly, by accessing their own accounts respectively at their convenience. The ongoing and reciprocal discussions regarding student progress occur between teachers, students, guidance counselors, parents, and school leaders in various venues, including email, telephone conversations, and face-to-face conferencing.

What the school needs to improve

- Promote parent involvement and increase parent participation in the school decision-making process leading to a shared commitment to the school's vision and mission.
 - Although the Learning Environment Survey indicates a high level of satisfaction with regard to the education offered at Bronx Lab, parent engagement in the decision-making process is limited to the work of the few who are on the school leadership team. The school community offers limited opportunities for parents to participate in leadership workshops or trainings that would enable them to engage in the work of resurrecting the parent association to support student activities.
- Improve differentiation of instruction so that all lessons engage students and are appropriately challenging.
 - Lessons are not consistently differentiated across grade levels and classrooms. Not all teachers regularly provide multiple entry points or supports to enable all students can access information needed to participate successfully in the learning. In addition, there is limited use of technology as a differentiation strategy, which means that not all teachers structure activities to match the learning styles of all students.
- Further develop leadership capacity so that all team leaders are rigorous in evaluating the effectiveness of teacher teams engaged in inquiry work.
 - Although there are many opportunities for teacher teams to engage in professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development are not so well developed. Structures are beginning to emerge which are welcomed by all those involved. However, team leaders are not regularly provided with the training, supports, or feedback necessary to maximize the full effectiveness of inquiry work in its quest to accelerate student learning for all subgroups to the same high level.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Bronx Laboratory School	Δ	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X			
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				X			
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed