



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx School of Law and Finance

High School 284

**99 Terrace View Avenue
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Evan Schwartz

Dates of review: February 27 - 28, 2007

Reviewer: Clive Parsons

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx School of Law and Finance was created under the New Century/New Vision reform movement. It caters for students in grades 9 through 12. The school is in its fourth year and this year's seniors will be the first to graduate. The building is shared with a number of other small schools.

There are currently just under 400 students enrolled. Approximately 8% are special education students and about 5% are English language learners. Both of these proportions are lower than City and similar schools. Fifty eight percent of students are Black, 40% are Hispanic and 2% are Asian and from other ethnic backgrounds. The school receives Title 1 funding, with a much higher proportion of eligible students than in similar schools and schools across the City.

Student attendance, at 87% in 2005, is above that in similar schools and well above schools across the City. Teacher retention is high.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a strong vision for the continued and sustained development of the school.
- The very positive climate, with an emphasis on professionalism for all, supports and encourages students to make good progress.
- Students value the wide range of opportunities available to them, including the breadth of the taught curriculum as well as additional activities such as visits and internships.
- Staff feel empowered and supported in trying new approaches and strategies to make learning even more effective.
- The principal continues to build the capacity of the school by dispersing leadership and responsibility widely throughout the staff.
- The small school environment is used very well to get to know students and they value the support and encouragement that they receive, believing that everyone is committed to their growth and success.
- The advisory program is central to the building and sustaining the strong sense of community between students and between students and staff.
- The Scaffolding Apprenticeship Model team is developing a critical analysis approach to the use of data to strengthen students' skills.
- Self-reflection is an integral part of the school's culture, so that staff are constantly striving to improve their practice and student outcomes.
- Staff have been very carefully selected to support and enable the school's vision to be implemented and its culture to be supported.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop and implement strategies to improve attendance to the rate set out in the Comprehensive Education Plan.
- Continue to share most effective practice in grading, tracking and recording student progress to enable even more focused and timely interventions.
- Continue to develop the use of differentiation and scaffolding of learning, particularly to aid student comprehension and access to information.
- Ensure that all plans include timeframes for achieving goals and targets, with appropriate progress checkpoints.
- Ensure that the planned development of the Mathematics B program strengthens student outcomes as intended.
- Build on the close working relationships and curriculum mapping to strengthen further the opportunities for integration and cooperation between subjects.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal, ably supported by the assistant principal, established the school from new. Together, they have fashioned the school to realize the vision developed at that time. They have established a very secure base on which to build high student achievement. The culture and climate of the school are very supportive and, together with the opportunities offered, are enabling students to make good academic and personal progress. Students particularly appreciate the emphasis that the school places on developing a professional attitude and approach. This includes the dress code, as well as their attitudes and work ethic.

Collegiate and collaborative working, amongst all members of the school community and continuous self-reflection, are trade-marks of the school. This is resulting in a very student centered approach and staff and students taking ownership and personal responsibility for their own progress. Teachers are encouraged to try new things and take initiative in developing them. These important and fundamental characteristics have been carefully nurtured by the principal. He knows the school and its community well. He has a very clear vision for its continued development and the capacity to achieve very high outcomes for students. While the school is aware of the progress of individuals, groups of students and the cohort as a whole, it is not yet in a position to compare its overall performance with other similar schools and schools across the City until its first cohort has graduated this summer.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient with well-developed features.

Teachers collect a range of data to identify what students know and can do over time. A group of teachers are developing and testing out a new assessment-based grading policy to ensure that judgments are fair, reliable and consistent, as well as open and understood by all. These policies are also helping students to be very clear and specific about what they need to do in order to improve their grades. The school's collegiate and cooperative culture ensures that lessons learned are spread and picked up by other teachers, thereby improving practice more widely.

Weekly meetings between advisory and content teachers ensure that the performance of students, and especially those causing some concern, is kept under constant review. The school's procedures then ensure that discussions and interventions such as tutoring are put in place to address and resolve any issues identified. The credit and examination accumulation of students is systematically tracked and recorded. Electronic recording is enabling some teachers to spot patterns within a class or across students more easily. This in turn is enabling more focused and timely analysis and interventions.

Marking period analysis is used to evaluate the performance of individual students and of class groups. The Princeton Review is used to provide formative assessment for mathematics and English. Data is reviewed through monthly meetings of the school leadership team, who also evaluate broader aspects such as participation in activities and parental involvement. The Scaffolding Apprenticeship Model team is developing a critical analysis approach to the use of data to strengthen students' skills. The focus of the team's work and the target student group were identified following a careful skills analysis of curriculum and examination requirements and outcomes. The team is careful to explore the performance of sub-groups, including by ethnicity and gender for example. Data pertaining to special education students and English language learners is also kept under constant review.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

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

Data is used appropriately to formulate and drive the Comprehensive Education Plan. The goals established are measurable and challenging. They represent good progress and high achievement for the students. The plan underpins the clear vision for the continued and sustained development of the school which is shared and understood by all. Short term student goals are developed well in response to monitoring their performance and progress in class as a result of on-going assessment. This is especially strong, for example, where students are targeted for additional tutoring, where teachers are implementing new grading policies and where students are targeted by the SAM team. This ensures that those most in need of improvement are targeted and supported effectively. Consequently plans and goals for improving student performance drive all members of the school's community uniformly and consistently. However, not all the plans established within the school are yet underpinned by progress checkpoints and interim goals and timeframes for achieving the longer term goals established. The school's advisory program is central to generating and using the widest possible knowledge about individual students to establish plans and goals for improvement.

The school's focus on professionalism underpins the work of students and adults alike. The administration's high expectations are picked up and owned by the school community. This means that staff and students have high expectations of themselves and each other. This is supporting the development of the highest standards of work, behavior and ethics. Parents are successfully encouraged to play as full a part in the life of the school as possible. Meetings are usually accompanied with an event, such as student celebrations and performances, to encourage fuller participation. Contact is made with home as soon as academic, attitude or attendance issues arise in order to resolve the problem as quickly as possible.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient with well-developed features.

The curriculum is carefully chosen to meet graduation requirements, enable the school's vision to be implemented successfully and to provide valuable enrichment opportunities,

such as through visits and internships. Students appreciate the wide range of opportunities made available to them. Very good teacher collaboration and curriculum mapping is highlighting connections and links across content areas, which is becoming emphasised through museum visits for example. The school recognises the potential of extending this work further. In line with the school's vision, students take both law and finance classes for the first two years and then major in one or the other. Extended day and summer recovery programs are supporting students in making up any slippage in progress and credits. Spring term re-evaluation of schedules and classes also enables deficiencies in Regents examinations to be rectified. Advanced placement courses extend higher achieving students. Data analysis has resulted in changes being implemented to the mathematics B program, with consequent implications for the mathematics A, in order to strengthen student outcomes.

Teachers feel accountable for the quality of their work and for student outcomes. Instruction is student centered and they respond well, willingly engaging in the activities offered. Teachers are proficient at using data to scaffold and differentiate the support and challenge provided to students. Even so, there remain opportunities to strengthen this further, particularly to aid student comprehension and access to information, and so to ensure maximum engagement in high quality, challenging learning. Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs identified through the data, as well as through the development and implementation of the school's vision. This has, for example, resulted in the school employing its own physical education teacher for the first time this year, as well buying in specialist mathematics support. Teachers feel well supported and provided with the resources necessary to do their job effectively.

The principal has established a very positive school climate and culture which supports and encourages students to make good progress. The advisory program is central to the building and sustaining the strong sense of community between students and between students and staff. Staff make very good use of the small school environment to get to know students well, both academically and socially. Students value the support and encouragement that they receive from staff and believe that everyone is committed to their growth and success. Good attendance is afforded a high priority and is currently above that in similar schools. Challenging goals have been established and there is much effective practice being put into achieving them. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go to reach the significant improvement being targeted.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

Staff have been very carefully selected to support the school's culture and enable the principal's vision to be achieved. The result is a high degree of collegiate activity and consistency of approach. Professional development is based upon identified needs, through staff surveys for example, as well as performance data. Teachers feel empowered and supported in trying new approaches and strategies to make learning even more effective. Their constant self-reflection supports this well. In addition to more formal professional development, teachers spend much valuable time working and planning together, which shares and spreads effective practice. This includes visiting each other's classrooms. The assistant principal has a very strong focus on instruction and professional development. This ensures that the administration are frequent visitors to classrooms and know well the strengths and development areas for individual teachers.

The principal continues to build the capacity of the school by dispersing leadership and responsibility widely through the staff and students. He has a strong vision for the continued and sustained development of the school and the capacity to achieve it. The principal is very well respected by the whole school community. The school runs smoothly, with procedures that are clear and enacted consistently by adults and students alike. Positive relationships with law firms and finance organizations provide additional experiences for students, such as visits and internships. The National Academy Foundation has provided much appreciated professional development for staff, as well as opportunities and experiences for students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient with well-developed features.

Self reflection is an integral part of the school's culture. Staff are constantly striving to improve their practice so as to maximize student outcomes. This is enabled by an open and collegiate school climate. Evidence is taken from direct observation, as well as interim assessment and examination data. Comparisons between individuals and groups of students are made as appropriate and as available. The Comprehensive Education Plan is constructed through collaboration between the administration, staff and parents. A framework of meetings ensures that it, and the school's progress more generally, is kept under continual review. The goals established are pertinent and measurable, but not all plans include interim goals, progress checkpoints and timeframes for achieving them. Nevertheless, the school is adept at making changes and modifications, such as to programs and schedules, as necessary on the basis of the evaluations made.

The principal, capably supported by the assistant principal and indeed the whole school community, has built the school carefully and steadily since its inception. Each stage of its development has been carefully constructed upon the secure foundations laid previously. Structures and systems have been flexibly introduced and modified over time so as to maximize student achievement. The school's relatively short life span, however, means that it does not yet have final graduation data with which to make comparisons with other schools and with its own previous performance.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx School of Law and Finance (HS 284)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			X
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	