



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx Leadership Academy High School

**High School 525
1710 Webster Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Kenneth Gaskins, Jr.

Dates of review: April 24 – 25, 2007

Reviewer: Maggie Hollingsworth

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 Leadership Academy is a small high school with 631 students enrolled from grade 9 through 12. The school is popular and demand for places outstrips the supply. The school's population is made up of 55% Hispanic, 40% Black, 3% White and less than 2% from Asian and other groups. There are almost twice as many female students as male. Just under 5% of the students are English language learners, a lower proportion than the average in City schools. About 14% of the enrolment is special education students. Around 75% of students have Title 1 eligibility which is considerably higher than the average for similar and City schools. Attendance declined over the last two years but at 85.8% last year was still more than three points higher than the average for similar and City schools.

This is an Empowerment School. These schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control their resources and are free to purchase or develop professional development services, choose with which schools to affiliate. They also benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a strong leader who is highly ambitious for the students and communicates this to the whole school community.
- Skilled and experienced administrators support the principal very well and ensure that the school is safe and runs smoothly and efficiently.
- The school uses test and examination data very well to identify priorities for budgeting, staffing and scheduling.
- The students are very well prepared for tests and examinations and success rates are high.
- Through regular and frequent reports home, the school keeps parents very well informed about their children's progress.
- Students are proud of their achievements and strive to do their best.
- Staff give their time generously to help students achieve success and most care passionately about the students' welfare and progress.
- The school's focus on community service produces well rounded, confident students who are well equipped for adult life.
- There is some very effective teamwork and collaborative planning within staff teams which enables teachers to evaluate their actions and learn from each other.
- The school makes excellent use of its partnerships with other agencies to extend opportunities for learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish a school wide data base to pull together all departmental information.
- Ensure that lessons are differentiated to meet the needs of all students.
- Improve the consistency of lesson planning and record keeping.
- Improve the classroom environment so that all rooms are stimulating and inviting places to learn and set consistently high standards for the way students present their work.
- Continue to strive to improve attendance, especially for intermittent attenders.
- Include interim goals and check points in action plans.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Bronx Leadership Academy is an improving school. Its results are rising and are well above those of other City schools. College acceptances are the highest they have ever been. The staff and students are rightly proud of these achievements. The principal is highly respected and his strong leadership is valued by staff at all levels. He was described by one assistant principal as ‘the glue that hold us together’. The school runs smoothly and efficiently.

The school is small enough for staff and students to know each other very well. Students and parents appreciate the interest that teachers take in students’ welfare and progress. They spoke with gratitude of the extra hours teachers give to responding to students’ needs. Daily instruction is helping students make progress, but lesson planning does not always take sufficient account of the students varying needs. Nevertheless the students are very well motivated. Many take advantage of the wide range of classes and tutored sessions, including advanced courses in world history and biology, to improve their grades and their chances of graduation. The school makes very good use of data to determine where to focus its budget spending to get the best results from State examinations.

The school has identified the need to further improve attendance. Recent strategies to encourage better attendance have achieved some success but there is room for further improvement.

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.

The school gathers and analyzes a large amount of data from tests and assessments including Regents examinations, mock tests and the cohort report. This shows that results are rising steadily overall and that most students are making good progress. Administrators compare the school’s results judiciously over time and with other similar schools and schools City-wide. The school knows how far results have risen both for individual students and for cohorts, celebrates each increase and takes action where shortcomings remain. Its careful record keeping and analysis have enabled it to appeal official data on the achievement of special education students which underestimated their progress. Its intervention programs for these students are well judged and students are making at least satisfactory progress.

Teachers test the students regularly and keep their own records of the students’ scores in, for example, quizzes and homework grades. The full range of data from formal and informal tests is analyzed by each department to look for trends within and between classes. Information from six formal assessments each semester provides the school and the parents with a clear view of students’ progress. Student transcripts keep a running

record of their achievement which is regularly used by key leaders and counselors to encourage students who are doing well and advise others on how to make up lost ground. The students spoke very highly of the impact of these discussions on their motivation to work hard. Information is captured efficiently by departments on their own spreadsheets but there is no school wide data base to pull all the information together.

The school has used its analysis to target action where it is most needed; for example, its data shows that although English language learners and special education students progress relatively well, Black boys have fallen behind. Appropriate actions have been planned to make up the shortfall.

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 proficient.

School leaders and faculty make proficient use of the data to plan timely actions for improvement both across the school and within departments. For example, when the school’s analysis highlighted that Black boys’ made slow progress and achieved below expectations, the school initiated mentoring for them immediately, and planned boys’ only class in the longer term. In addition, when data on the number of credits accumulated by senior and junior cohorts identified which students were underachieving in which subjects, the school took swift action to provide relevant additional classes.

Departments also make good use of the detailed information in the cohort report to identify where extra help is needed. In mathematics, for example, lower achieving students were singled out for extra tutoring to increase their chances of achieving good grades. In English, item analysis from the Princeton Review website was used to adjust teaching in the shorter term. The school recognizes that not all departments use the information as rigorously, and is addressing this in its improvement plans.

The school expects a great deal from its students and gives them high aspirations. Examples of the students’ best work, annotated photographs of the ‘students of the month’, honors boards and copies of college acceptances all give a consistent message to students as they move around the school. Opportunities for seniors to mentor younger students and for lower achievers to take part in cross age tutoring at a local primary school help to boost the students’ self esteem. There are constant reminders by the principal and administrators of the need to aim high in Regents’ tests and to graduate well. Classrooms do not always reflect the school’s desire for high standards. The students do not have enough pride in the way they write and present their work, and the classroom environment is not consistently stimulating and inviting.

The ‘Open school week’ for parents of prospective freshmen sets out the school’s expectations that they will support the school, but despite this the number who attend events is small. However, there is strong support from the parents who volunteer, for example for classroom and hall patrol, help with IT instruction and with Saturday Spanish and fitness classes. Communication with parents is frequent, through a regular newsletter and monthly reports home. Voicemail messaging is used if parents are out and the school needs to get in touch. Parents spoke with gratitude of the amount of information they receive, both good and the bad, about their children.

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.

The curriculum is carefully selected to ensure that students have the best chance of graduating and securing good college places. Course outcomes are analyzed to assess whether the students have achieved expected levels and if not, whether the courses need to be realigned. An analysis of the poor results in social studies compared with other subjects, for example, indicated that students lacked instruction in aspects of law and government. The curriculum has been adjusted to include these elements and interim test scores show that target grades are now being met.

Additional support is offered through after hours and Saturday classes, improving the students’ academic achievement being the driving force. Assessment data informs decisions on which courses to offer within the constraints of staff expertise and availability. The principal has made appropriate decisions on where to focus resources to secure the best returns for students in need. These have included extra classes in English and mathematics for lower achievers to make up shortfalls and advanced classes to extend the most able. Scheduling a common planning period for departments has been a cost effective way of encouraging team work and promoting the achievement of the school’s goals.

Using their knowledge of the students’ needs, subject teachers use their common planning time to determine how to focus teaching to develop the students’ skills. This improves the consistency of planning, although in lessons not all teachers follow these plans. Teachers’ record keeping is generally helpful but varies in the amount of detail it provides.

The school responds flexibly and quickly to students’ academic and personal needs. Staff give their time freely and students report that teachers, counselors and administrators are always there when they need help. Staff make a point of rigorously monitoring students placed on daily report, ensuring that the students understand that staff care about them and want them to do well. The same is true of attendance. There are good procedures for monitoring and follow up absence with a same day response, although the school does not analyze intermittent attendance to check for patterns and trends. The students’ strong commitment to learning shows in their willingness to attend after school and Saturday classes. Students are proud of their achievements and strive to do well. They are willing learners in lessons, and learn quickly when the teaching is good and lessons challenge and actively engage them. Trips and visits have helped motivate low achievers.

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.

The school is strongly led and the principal is well respected by students, staff and parents. Good teamwork among senior leaders ensures that the school runs smoothly and that the students are well cared for. Through meeting and greeting the students outside the premises at the start of the day and installing cameras in vulnerable areas of the building, the school has secured adequate levels of student safety.

New staff are carefully selected by interview with the full cabinet and a departmental representative. The students' views are also taken into account. Potential teachers also commit to extracurricular activities and classes since this is an expectation of employment. The school makes good use of the summer bridging program to induct staff into the school's culture and expectations.

The principal is strongly committed to teachers' professional development. The program provides an extensive range of opportunities for interschool visitation, peer observations, workshops and team discussions. It is well organized to enable staff to take advantage of common planning periods. A hired consultant has started work with teachers in volunteer departments on differentiation, providing advice and modeling good practice. Although this is starting to improve instruction in these departments, there is still insufficient differentiated work in most classrooms.

Informal and formal classroom visits by senior leaders have given the administration a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in each department. Observations are supplemented by video recordings of lessons which provide the focus for later discussion with faculty leaders. These recordings have also proved useful as tools for professional development, spreading good practice in a number of departments. The school is seeking to extend their use where staff are currently reluctant.

The school has a strong relationship with its CBO, South Bronx Churches, and a productive partnership with a range of community service projects and local businesses that provide internships for older 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.

The school is ambitious for the students and focuses its plans for the curriculum and professional development on ensuring that the students achieve their best. Test results and teachers' assessments provide regular pointers to the progress of individuals and to whether the school has met its overall goals, particularly those for graduation. Cabinet members and coaches have a good overview of their own areas of responsibility. The comprehensive education plan highlights accurately strengths and areas for development. Its goals drive the school's actions for the year, although it does not set benchmarks to enable it to assess progress in the interim.

Staff use data proficiently to diagnose whether actions have had the required impact on the students' progress and to inform future plans. Planning in teams for the short term is proficient and, in some leading departments, has led to swift and effective interventions that have accelerated students' progress.

The school's responsiveness to need and its flexibility in aligning curriculum are significant strengths. They have been the key factors in the sustained rise in students' test and examination results. The school is aware that there is still work to do, for example, in focusing on subject areas which are not as strong as others, to ensure that the students receive a consistently high standard of instruction.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Leadership Academy High School (HS 525)	∅	✓	+
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	