

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Brooklyn High School of the Arts**

**High School 656**

**345 Dean Street**

**Brooklyn**

**NY 11217**

**Principal: Margaret Lacey-Berman**

**Dates of review: May 13 - 14, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Barry King**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Brooklyn High School of the Arts serves 561 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 76% Black, 19% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian students and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 1% special education students. Male students account for 41% of the students enrolled and females account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007- 2008 was 87%. The school is not currently in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Students are selected for admission by their potential in the arts. The building was shared with two other schools, which resulted in the loss of the school library space. Presently there is only one other school and the library is being replaced. At the start of this academic year, a new principal and two assistant principals took up post.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The school has a strong tradition in the arts, underpinning the impressive growth in students' artistic abilities and personal qualities. It is weaker in academic subjects, with pockets of deeper concern regarding the achievement of African American boys and the challenges set for higher achieving students. With a clear vision for the future growth of the school, the principal made key appointments to the administration and instituted a range of other changes, so that the school has made significant progress over the past year. Central to the changes has been the creation of structures to allow extensive collaboration and the delegation of responsibility to teachers. The team spirit of the staff is good and they readily acknowledge how much more attention they now give to the performance data they regularly collect. The excellent school climate, with the high levels of mutual respect between students and their capability for sustained and mature interaction in class, is a fine platform on which to develop styles of teaching that challenge all students.

The school's capacity to improve students' academic performance is improving, although the administration, faculty and students recognize that there is still some way to go. Key to the school's future success are a raising of expectations, sharper goal setting, clearer professional development plans with an emphasis on using data to plan instruction, and smarter analysis of school-wide data to monitor student progress.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and the newly constituted administrative team have a clear vision for the future development of the school that is widely shared and is having a strong impact upon its development.
- The school takes well-judged strategic decisions, for example on leadership structures and the curriculum, which have a positive impact on the way the school works, as seen in the much improved attention to performance data.
- Well-developed arrangements for collaboration enable the staff to share good practice with each other and collate data on the progress of individual students.
- There is strong representation of the arts in the curriculum and this has a significant impact on the attendance, personal growth and self-confidence of the students.
- The school has a very good tone, with high levels of trust and mutual respect that enable teachers to use interactive learning strategies that encourage students to think for themselves.
- Teachers across the curriculum collect and collate data about many aspects of the performance of students on a very frequent basis.

### What the school needs to improve

- Raise expectations and rigor to improve achievement in academic subjects, paying particular attention to the progress made by African American students, boys and those capable of achieving the highest levels.
- Set, share and communicate long-term and interim measurable goals, differentiating goals for each student.
- Build on professional development programs by extending teachers' capacity to use data to differentiate instruction and by ensuring that all members of staff have a personal development plan with clear goals.
- Extend the collection and analysis of data through regular scrutiny of student notebooks and ongoing analysis of subgroup performance.

## 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 staff's awareness of the importance of collecting data and using it to set goals and plan instruction has risen significantly over the past year. They are now much more familiar with ARIS and Acuity. In addition to formal standardized testing, teachers make frequent ongoing assessments of their students' work through tests, classroom observation and other means. This happens across the curriculum with, for example, assessments against very clear goals in the Fitnessgram program in physical education and against rubrics in art. The relative weak spot is the omission of an adequate level of scrutiny of students' notebooks, which are often poorly presented and incomplete. Teachers regularly communicate data on performance to students and parents through the report cards at the end of the six marking periods. Some teachers supplement report cards with intervening progress reports issued. Parents are very appreciative of the extent of the information they receive, with teachers communicating at other times as the need arises through phone calls, notes and emails. Some teachers have their own websites. In an initiative to avoid holdovers and promote progress, relevant members of staff examine data on freshmen students, the "9<sup>th</sup> Grade Academy", at weekly conferences. The administration has a good understanding that certain groups, notably African American boys and students capable of reaching the highest grades, are underachieving. However, the school does not data on subgroups is not systematically analyzed on an ongoing basis. The school's alertness to the attendance levels resulted in a number of changes in procedure that have pushed attendance from 87% last year to 91% this year.

**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 proficient.**

The regular setting of student goals has taken root across the school. Data on performance at the end of each marking period is used to counsel students on setting goals for the next one. To varying degrees, students can articulate them. Some classrooms have a wall display of individual goals. The school routinely uses the results from Acuity testing to indicate students' next learning steps in English and math. Teachers tend to relate student goals to working habits, such as trying harder or doing more homework, or to specific skills that they must master in order to move forward. They often set themselves personal goals, for example related to the percentages they

would like to achieve in Regents tests. There is not yet a systematic goal setting procedure in which such measurable goals are agreed with students and communicated to parents. However, there was a breakthrough via the work of the Inquiry Team this year. It set precise goals, albeit not differentiated for each student, for the final English scores of the target group, with two very clear benchmark scores that should be reached along the way. The school develops its Comprehensive Educational Plan through a consultative process and it has clear measurable goals for the school. It does not yet drive the work of the school sufficiently as its main goals are not communicated clearly enough to all stakeholders.

The school has very high expectations for the students' performance in the arts, something observed in the joyful rehearsal of a vocal group and in the many excellent examples of artwork in the corridors. Staff have equally high expectations of student behavior, which are realized in the mature interaction between students in class. However, expectations in aspects of academic work are not high enough, for example in the quality and organization of notebooks and in the extent and quality of homework. Otherwise good interactive lessons often lack a cutting edge by not having sharp enough learning objectives to help lift student understanding. Students themselves think they should do better in their academic subjects, with a group of older students unanimously agreeing with one who said, "We should be pushed harder".

**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.**

The school's focus on the arts is the defining feature of the school and students greatly enjoy the arts curriculum. It has a very strong impact on their attendance, personal growth and self-confidence. All elements of the curriculum align with state standards and flexibility occurs in the mixing of students of different grades who are at the same level of mastery of a subject. The school offers a small range of advanced courses but the students rightly say they would like this to be extended. The school mounts a strong program of after-school arts activities, although it has decided not to commit resources to sports competitions. It runs a range of classes at the end of normal school and on Saturday to enable slower learners to catch up. The principal has made highly pertinent decisions to allocate resources to improve student outcomes, for example in the purchase of a program to start next year in grade 10 that will address head on the relative weaknesses in notebook monitoring and homework. The leadership recognizes that it has some way to go to include the use of modern technology in lessons on a regular basis but a start has been made through the purchase of a few Smartboards.

The tone of the school is very good. Students feel very safe and are highly respectful of each other, as shown in the way they listen to each other in the many class discussions. One student summed this up by saying "we are a close-knit family".

The staff's teaching styles typically make the students learn for themselves through research and interaction of many sorts. In most classrooms there is a productive hum of noise as students work and share with each other. Staff have an increasing appreciation of the importance of differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students and in some classes data is used to group students. However, the differentiation of tasks,

resources or learning styles is not frequently employed. In particular, strategies do not give sufficient attention to stretching the most able students.

**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's capacity to accelerate student learning has been considerably strengthened during the past year by the actions taken by the new principal. She has ensured that staff have opportunities to engage in a high level of collaborative activity, with 90% of staff having access to common planning time on a weekly basis. A particular example of this has been the weekly meetings of grade 9 staff to ensure that freshmen are not falling behind and that they have plans to move them forward if they do. The inquiry team, although small, has met weekly and made an important contribution to the school's improvement. Teachers appreciate the principal's supportive approach to professional development and they respond positively. Ten teachers are accompanying her to a training program in Atlanta this summer. The impact of these arrangements has been a greater sense of collegiality among the staff and more understanding of the importance of using data to plan instruction. They readily agree that their move to more differentiated instruction is still "work in progress" and they need to build their skills in doing this. The school, under its new leadership, has responded very well to the recommendation in the previous quality review to develop distributive leadership. Partly because of this, morale is high.

The administration conducts a range of classroom observations and is meticulous in providing feedback. Intervisitations, sometimes to good practice outside the school, support this process. There is a growing appreciation of personal and whole-school developments needs, but leaders do not document them in formal personal development plans with recorded goals.

**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 principal leads with an ambitious and infectious vision of an expanding the school with an excellent arts program and much stronger academic results. Well-judged strategic decisions have been taken to make this a reality, for example through the restructuring of the administration, the development of distributive leadership, the focus on achievement in grade 9 and the purchase of an expensive but timely external program to raise pedagogic skills. The importance of good quality data to make whole school and student-level decisions is well appreciated and the staff generate regular flows of this to help them in their negotiation of goals with students. Certain building blocks are not yet in place, such as the setting of measurable achievement goals for all students and central analysis of data to show at a glance how, for example, subgroups are performing. The leadership is aware of these points and is willing to move on them as soon as possible.

The school's self-evaluation is a consultative process that involves all stakeholders, including students. Students have recently been able to share opinions through a specifically devised forum. The outcome of the most recent process was a realistic summary of progress and some of the things that need to develop further. There is a well-constructed Comprehensive Educational Plan, but the document is not yet at the centre of the school's improvement process.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Brooklyn High School of the Arts</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		<b>X</b>		
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### 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, DY0, 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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed