

**Extended Learning Opportunities in Fostering
Student Achievement**

Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science School Profile

Bronx, New York

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Background

Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science is a relatively small alternative high school located in the Borough of Bronx, New York. The school is located in one of the poorest sections of the Bronx and the diversity of the student body reflects that of the surrounding community with respect to both race/ethnicity and family income level. Approximately 360 ninth through twelfth graders attend school in a four-story pre-World War II structure in need of renovation. The school abuts a modern structure that houses the Hostos Lincoln Community College.

Hostos-Lincoln Academy draws students from throughout the Bronx. The school was established 15 years ago to address the issues of poor attendance and high dropout rates primarily among Hispanic students. It is an Alternative School in the sense that students apply for admission or they are recommended for admission by their eighth grade teachers in middle schools throughout the Bronx. The students who attend Hostos-Lincoln do not necessarily have behavioral issues but are referred to Hostos because they have “dropped out” academically based on their low reading scores and poor attendance. Many of the students come from broken families and live in dangerous neighborhoods¹.

The initial design of the school was based on the middle college concept with strong connections to the local community college, a rich and varied curriculum, and additional time built into the school day and throughout the school year. The school began with only a ninth grade class with additional classes added in subsequent years. A “Summer Bridge” program was developed which was an

intensive 4-week summer program for the incoming ninth graders to improve their skills in language arts, math, and science and to serve as a “bridge” to prepare them academically, socially, and emotionally for the challenges and expectations of high school. The summer program has been expanded to six weeks with and, ironically after fifteen years of success, the “Summer Bridge” initiative is now being implemented in all high schools in New York². The extended learning initiative, which now includes the Summer Bridge program, an extended school day, Saturday school, Holiday school, and parent and community involvement, discussed in detail below, was initiated during the school’s second year. The drive and vision for this school stems directly from the principal, Dr. Michele Cataldi, whose overall goal was to create a learning place where young people would like to come.

Hostos Academy is located at 149th Street and the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. The student population is mostly Latino and African American: 75% Hispanic, 21% African American, 3% Asian, and 0.6% Caucasian. Approximately 75% of the students qualify for Free and Reduced Price Meals and 46% are English Language Learners. The student population is served by 19 teachers and six administrators and counselors. Over 80% of the teachers have an advanced degree and approximately the same percentage have been teaching at Hostos for over two years. Five of the teachers have been at the school since its inception and were an integral part of the original design process.

The principal and staff have created and implemented a unique and challenging learning environment. The school focuses

¹ Newsweek, October 24, 1994.

² Hostos Lincoln Inquirer, March, 2001.

on teamwork and collaborative learning between students, parents, faculty, and the surrounding community to achieve its vision of giving every student the opportunity to achieve maximum potential and acquire the necessary skills to be successful in the 21st century. Their challenge is to be a school where no student is overlooked. The staff at Hostos believe in their students and they have been successful in creating a true learning community and providing a support structure to prepare students for the future.

“We raise the expectations and everyone excels.” - Dr. Michele Cataldi, Principal

This multi-faceted approach to education, which has really been on the cutting edge of school innovation, has led to considerable success for both the students and the school itself. Over 80% of the students go on to higher education; their daily attendance rate (93.1%) is the seventh highest of all New York City schools³ (behind the likes of the selective Townsend Harris HS, Bronx HS of Science, Stuyvesant HS, Brooklyn Tech, etc.); and, the drop out rate last year was zero. The debate team as well as the girls’ volleyball, coed softball, and bowling teams have won citywide championships. In December 2000, Hostos-Lincoln was one of ten schools (only two high schools) in New York City to receive the Effective Schools Award from the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige has listed Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science a 2001-2002 Blue Ribbon School⁴, one of seven in New York State and 172 nationally.

³ New York Post, January 26, 2002

⁴ The Blue Ribbon program, now in its 19th year, honors excellence in leadership,

“The consistently excellent performance of Hostos-Lincoln Academy students proves that you can come from a household where English is not the first language, from a single-parent household, or qualify for public assistance and still accomplish as much as others who may have been given more opportunities.” - Rep. Jose Serrano (D-South Bronx)

Beginnings

Hostos-Lincoln Academy is a community dedicated to assisting their students in improving their academic skills, stimulating their interest in learning, and ensuring their emotional and social growth and active participation in the wider community. Students are challenged academically and socially and they are held accountable not just to academic success but also to active participation and involvement in the school community and community at-large. The many parts of the extended learning environment are a means to help the students academically and socially and to help create a family that extends to the real family of the students.

“We threw out the Mickey Mouse curriculum and introduced [University of the State of New York] Regents-level courses. ... We provide a rigorous curriculum and then stretch the time delivery and provide additional support.” - Dr. Michele Cataldi, Principal

As noted, the extended learning initiative at Hostos-Lincoln was part of the initial school design. What began as an initial summer program expanded rapidly into

teaching, curriculum, student achievement, and parental involvement.

an after-school program, a Saturday support program, and additional learning and enrichment opportunities offered during school holidays and break periods. The principal and staff have formed numerous partnerships with community organizations to help staff and provide supplies and additional resources to lend support to the extended learning initiative.

The collaborative partnership between the high school and the adjoining Hostos Community College allows students to use the college's science laboratories and to attend the community college tuition free. Students may also earn college credits in science and pre-engineering at City College and Biology at Hunter College. Hostos also offers a 4-year premedical program including health occupation internships at the neighboring Lincoln Hospital.

In addition to the challenging Regents program, Hostos-Lincoln offers Advanced Placement (AP) courses in History, Biology, Spanish, Math, and English. The arts program includes courses in stained glass, photography, drama, music, and dance.

Program Structure and Content

The extended learning initiative at Hostos-Lincoln began with the Summer Bridges program in its first year. The Summer Bridges program is required for potential new students – mostly rising ninth graders. It is an opportunity for the new students and the school to see if Hostos is a good fit for the students. Summer Bridges meets 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, for six weeks. In addition to its academic focus, designed to prepare the rising ninth graders for the academic rigors of Hostos-Lincoln, Summer Bridges also acquaints the new student with the contributions they are expected to make to their school

and community and their responsibilities and commitment to making an investment in themselves, their school, and community.

Summer Bridges also allows students, who may be struggling academically, to make up class work in the regular summer program. Some students may take an additional course over the summer to further advance academically, but the course load and course opportunities over the summer are somewhat limited.

The typical school day at Hostos-Lincoln runs from 7:00 am to 5:30 pm. The school day is structured so the students can utilize the science laboratories at the adjoining Hostos Community College before college classes begin. The after-school portion of the extended day typically runs from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm. A wide range of opportunities is offered during this time period. The subject teachers provide intensive tutoring on a regularly scheduled basis. Students are able to expand their learning on material they may not have enough time to absorb in a 45-minute class period. Over 90% of the teaching staff is committed to providing tutoring or enrichment courses during after-school. In addition, advanced students provide peer tutoring support and homework help to underclasspersons, primarily in math and science. These sessions typically last about 45 - 60 minutes and have a student-teacher ratio of about 5 to 1.

In addition to extensive tutoring and homework help, a wide range of enrichment classes are offered during the afterschool hours in stained glass, drama, dance, music, debate, photography, peer mediation, SAT Prep, English as a Second Language reading and writing support, health occupation/CPR certification, and computers and technology. Regular

classroom teachers and personnel from the College NOW and Liberty Partnership programs staff these classes. These programs are partnerships between City University of New York, community-based organizations, local colleges, high school students, parents, and businesses. College NOW is a Hostos Community College collaborative program that orients eleventh and twelfth grade students to the differences between high school and college and encourages them to set higher levels of expectations for themselves. Currently, College Now is working with the journalism teacher to develop a prototype after school class to help students improve the reading and writing skills necessary for performance on the English Language Arts Regents and proficiency exams. The Liberty Partnership Program is similar in nature and is designed to reduce the dropout rate and encourage college success for Latino youth. Liberty Partnership also takes students on college visits and provides them with tutoring jobs after school during the year, as well as summer jobs. This year students assigned to their summer youth program worked as mentors for the bridge program. Classes are staffed by college faculty, high school teachers, alumni from the programs, and undergraduate students who serve as mentors and tutors.

The stained glass program at Hostos has received national recognition. Students design and construct their own stained glass artwork that can range in size and complexity from small sun catchers to 3' x 5' masterpieces. Many pieces of work are done on consignment with the student receiving financial support for college. The stained glass students have won scholarships that enable them to take additional courses through the school's partnership with the Arts Connection. They have also participated in summer

workshops that offer a stipend along with work experience. Advanced students work in the stained glass room on Saturdays with the incoming students for the next year and the parents and community members who attend the Saturday Parent and Community classes. This not only helps them improve their art skills, but learn how to work with other people, organize their time effectively to enable them to perform better in all their classes, and prepare them to be better college students. During our visit, the students were completing their service project of creating a stained glass star for each of the firefighters, police, and emergency medical personnel who died as a result of the attack on the World Trade Center. This is only one instance of these students' support of and contribution to their community.

“If I didn’t have Hostos, I’d be out roaming the streets and getting into trouble. This is my family here. We help each other.” - Hostos-Lincoln 11th grader.

There is an extensive fine arts program at Hostos-Lincoln. Each year the students produce and stage a Broadway play. During our visit, a group of about 15 students were actively involved with converting *South Pacific* to a middle-east environment with an oil magnate instead of a plantation owner and with present sensibilities and new music. Students choreograph dances for these productions and also perform throughout the city. They also attend many on and off Broadway shows. They learn to analyze as well as write new dialogue and lyrics for the plays, which enables them to improve their performance in literature and social studies classes as well as on the Regents.

These extended learning opportunities carry over into the Saturday classes that also include classes for parents. Parents are an important component in building this family of support that surrounds the students. Starting with the initial meeting for the Bridge program in the summer, parents are involved as part of the education process. Parents are informed of expectations and requirements along with the students. The Saturday parent participation program offers classes in ESL, GED (both Spanish and English), computer technology, and stained glass. In addition, workshops are held for parents on high school requirements, college placements, college financial aid, and parenting skills. Separate classes are held for parents of 9, 10, 11, and 12 grade students. Childcare is available for families to encourage participation. Typically, between 70 – 80 parents attend the Saturday classes on a regular basis. Providing this academic and social support for the parents creates a true sense of family in this school. It is clear that the staff of Hostos-Lincoln is committed to the students and their families.

“It isn’t just the physical presence of the teachers that is important...their soul must be there also.” - Dr. Michele Cataldi, Principal

The program continues to offer additional opportunities over school breaks and holidays. Here the program expands to include physical education, sports, expanded recreational opportunities, and field trips to museums, businesses, and colleges.

There are several mentoring groups who work closely with the students at Hostos-Lincoln. Of particular note is the BHAG mentoring group – Big Hairy Audacious Goals. The BHAG Corporation is

composed of 65 graduates of Columbia University’s Executive MBA program. The corporation endeavors to advance educational opportunities for high school students that show exceptional promise. They provide advice and counsel to Hostos students, take them on field trips, provide the Kaplan tutoring program, and help them prepare for the PSAT and SAT exams.

“We believe in these kids. We try to create a feeling of belonging, a feeling that there are people who care about them.” - Hostos-Lincoln teacher.

Hostos-Lincoln students also give back to their community through several community service projects. Every fall, there is the Penny Harvest, a competition between grade levels as to who came bring in the most pennies. The money is used to buy food and clothing for the homeless in the area and any funds left over are contributed to local charities. A group of juniors delivered hot meals to people with AIDS who live alone and otherwise would not have a meal on Thanksgiving Day. They also prepared food and gift baskets that were delivered on Christmas morning to people with AIDS. Nearly 20 seniors participated in New York City’s Race for the Cure, raising money for breast cancer research. They participated in the race with their mentors from Charles Schwab and Company. The partnership with Schwab has helped the students better understand the stock market and other aspects of economics. It also gives them an opportunity to practice interviewing skills.

The peer counselor program at Hostos is quite active and has a significant service-learning component. Throughout the year, the peer counselors participate in fund raising activities and have also

worked in soup kitchens, entertained at homes for the elderly, and collected food and clothing for victims of floods, earthquakes, and other disasters. They participate in fund raising activities to bring gifts and comfort to children and the elderly at Calvary Hospital, a hospice for cancer patients. Students who participate can also receive school credit for working in the college nursery. Many of them also work as mentors in the Summer Bridge program to help new students with the transition into high school. These students can receive a work experience credit or be paid through Summer Youth Employment with the Liberty Partnership Program.

Program Administration

The administrator for all aspects of the extended learning initiative is the principal, Dr. Michele Cataldi. Ms. Susan Palmiotto and Mr. Vidal Pabon, both of whom have been at Hostos from the beginning, provide additional support and oversight. Dr. Cataldi is at the school from early morning to late evening every day and nearly every weekend. Many other staff spend similar amounts of time dedicated to building this community of learners.

The extended learning environment at Hostos-Lincoln is unique in many ways. But what really sets it apart from others, is that the school was designed with extended learning and development opportunities as the core element of its program. It began with the model of a Summer Bridge program with extended school day hours and a Saturday initiative that included programs and learning opportunities for parents.

When teachers sign on to work at Hostos, they are aware of the commitment to spend at least two afternoons a week

providing tutoring services and other support to the school and community. They are compensated at a rate of \$32.00 per hour for dedicated time over their regular contract hours. It is apparent that teachers at Hostos are dedicated and committed to their students as a vast majority put in many more hours than they are compensated for financially. In fact, when the after-school budget was cut by the city last year and the numbers of supplemental teacher hours had to be reduced, many teachers continued to work with the students on their own time.

Funding and Sustainability

The program receives its major financial support from the New York City Board of Education and from a grant from New York State Education Department to support after-school programs. The strong connection with the City University of New York, and Hostos Community College in particular, lends significant human resource and facility use support, if not necessarily direct financial support.

The school was initially designed as an alternative school with additional time and support to address the challenges and needs of students who were on the verge of dropping out of school. The initial budgets were developed with the additional resources required to address these challenges and needs; i.e., additional staff time. Despite the remarkable successes of Hostos-Lincoln, on multiple levels, there is never any assurance that the funding levels will be stable from one year to the next. As a result, the administration and staff are under continuous pressure to reduce expenditures and economize. When major funding cuts do occur, the principal typically approaches the president of the adjoining community college for additional space, supplies, and equipment

to make up for the missing resources. Teachers are asked to do more with less. The head of the art department has formed a viable partnership with private art organizations to supply the large quantities of colored glass required for the stained glass workshop. Much of her free time is spent in gathering supplies to keep the art department running.

The school facilities are immaculate and well maintained, but out-dated – and in striking contrast to the modern, open, well-lit, and well-equipped community college connected to the high school. Most of the classrooms in this 4-story structure are interior rooms with poor lighting. There is little, or no, audio-visual equipment available to help the teachers with classroom delivery and the collection of small, uncomfortable, student desks and tables in the classrooms can only be described as eclectic.

There are no lockers for the students to store their books, coats, and supplies during the day. In rooms that are cramped for space, such as the stained glass art room, bookbags and coats are left in the hallway during class – without fear that anything will be missing when retrieved at the end of the day. Students' work and accomplishments are displayed prominently throughout the school as a continual reminder of what this school is really about. It was noted by one of the visitors to this school, that this was the first high school restroom he has frequented in the last six years that did not reek of cigarette smoke. Students respect the rules established by their school and honor them.

When asked what additional programs should be incorporated into the extended learning and development initiative to be even more effective, Principal Cataldi responded immediately with two support

initiatives that would greatly benefit his students. There is a real need for additional counseling services, both guidance and social. With an ever increasing number of students going on to higher education, additional support is needed to help students with their high school course schedules so they are prepared to take on the more challenging courses earlier in their career and to help them find the college/university most appropriate to their interests and to assist with financial support. There is a real need for additional social counseling and mental health services to help students deal with the many social and family challenges they face on a daily basis. Second is the need for additional staff to help with the growing Limited English Proficient population, especially in mainstreaming these students more rapidly and effectively. There is a strong interest in forming small, focused tutoring groups for the English as a Second Language students and their parents to accelerate this mainstreaming effort.

Elements of Success

“As a diverse middle college concept school, all members of the school believe that high expectations and high standards, yield high achievement in both the academic and personal lives of our students. All students will master the necessary skills needed to be productive citizens of their school, community, and their world.” – Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science Mission Statement

It is clear, from many measures, that the administration, staff, students, and families are successful at meeting the challenges expressed in their mission statement. Students at Hostos are held to high expectations and to a high standard

of academic growth and social development. The students are aware of the challenges before them and respond positively to those challenges.

There is a high level of respect and admiration amongst the students and between the students and staff. The staff has set the level of expectations high at Hostos, not just for their students but also for themselves. Both teachers and students work hard to reach that level. Without Hostos, many of these young people would not have had the support structure to help keep them in school nor the academic, enrichment, and social opportunities to help them be successful in the 21st century. Yet, with respect, dedication, support, hard work, and a little extra time, these students are not just graduating from high school but 87% are going on to higher education (67% to 4-year colleges, 20% to 2-year colleges). The passing rate for the Regents level courses this year (2001) was 85%. 95% of the students met the graduation requirement on the Regents English exam. All of the African-American students passed the Regents English exam as did 93% of the Hispanic students. For the English Language Learners (ELL), 31% attained English proficiency and 83% achieved the mandated gains in English Language Acquisition. This compares with 13.2% and 68% respectively for Similar Schools⁵ in New York City. 47.4% of the ELL students passed the English Regents exam compared to 15.9% for Similar Schools.

Students attending Hostos-Lincoln are growing socially and emotionally and they are giving back to their community.

⁵ Similar Schools are defined as those having entering ninth and tenth graders with similar characteristics, including percent ELL, over-age for grade, average daily attendance and standardized test scores.

Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science is a community rich in supports and opportunities for its young people. There are lots of bright, smiling faces amongst the students – and the staff. There is a high level of professionalism amongst the teaching staff and a high level of commitment and enthusiasm. It is apparent that the teachers enjoy what they are doing and are committed to helping these young adults learn, be successful, and be a contributing part of their community.

The principal, Dr. Michele Cataldi, is the visionary leader at Hostos-Lincoln. He is the one who built the program, set the goals and aims, and built the staff who supports those aims. Many of the teachers who helped design this initiative fifteen years ago are still at Hostos.

It is difficult to get a true sense of what is taking place at Hostos-Lincoln Academy without spending some time at the school. What is taking place at Hostos-Lincoln is much more than what can, or should, be measured by test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance rates. The principal and staff have created a strong, enthusiastic community of learners. There is a real sense of family here and, like a family, the members of the family are committed to and supportive of one another. This is apparent in the teacher working one-on-one with a student struggling with a difficult concept in AP Biology; in the Principal who places a comforting arm around a student's shoulder as he asks about his siblings in Spanish; and in the drama students critiquing one another's work as they practice the new dance steps for *South Pacific*.

There is much at Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science that deserves to be replicated at other schools. This school is successful in meeting the needs of its

students because of its vision, high expectations, creativity in and out of the classroom, high levels of mutual respect, dedication to learning, commitment to youth, enthusiasm, and a little additional time. There is a fifteen year record of success and strong evidence as how to create a community and support structure to prepare young people for the future – academically, socially, and emotionally. As Dr. Cataldi aptly expressed it, “The results we’ve achieved at Hostos dictate that these are the things that should be done.”