

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Bronx Academy of Letters

Secondary School X551

**339 MORRIS AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10451**

Principal: ANNA HALL

**Dates of review: May 29-30, 2012
Lead Reviewer: Anthony R. Lodico**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Academy of Letters is a Middle/Secondary School with 579 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 34% Black, 65% Hispanic, 0% White, 1% Asian students and 0% other students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 93.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students and families benefit from a respectful, safe and nurturing learning environment that ensures academic and social emotional growth. (1.4)
 - The commitment to create a learning environment conducive to student success is evident throughout the school. Assistant principals and deans are present during the change of periods to guide students from class to class and monitor out-of-classroom behaviors. Also, in an effort to stress the importance of instructional time, teachers promptly take attendance after the bell rings to note lateness to class. As part of the school's advisory program, teachers are responsible for supporting and monitoring the academic and social-emotional growth of groups of students. This includes having follow-up conversations with latecomers and providing extra supports or enrichments for at-risk and high performing students, respectively. In addition, while all students receive advisory support, analysis of achievement and occurrence data indicated a need for targeted intervention for the middle school level. Thus, the administration, as a pre-emptive strategy, restructured the programs so that the middle school advisory period now occurs in the morning. This ensures that all students are connected with adults who are responsible for coordinating their youth development supports. As a result, there has been a decrease in the number of in-and out-of-classroom incidents at the middle school level, an increase in time on task for all students, and more students are producing proficient end-of-year capstone projects.
- The standards-based curricula are aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and emphasize higher order thinking and post- secondary readiness to support student success. (1.1)
 - The school was founded on and sustains the belief that students who read and write well will be successful in their post-secondary endeavors. Connected to that, in particular, the school has recently adopted a middle school curriculum, *Learning Cultures*, that integrates content area reading and writing within English language arts (ELA), which require students to justify their position using text based evidence. The school's increasing levels of students with disabilities (SWDs) are supported by the *Learning Cultures* curriculum in a variety of ways, including scaffolding the concepts and skills, explicitly calling out key vocabulary and chunking the reading passages into "bite size" segments. The work in the high school also focuses on ensuring that students are college ready. High school curricula also emphasize evidenced based writing across the content areas. Academic tasks are based on Regents exams and embed the school's focus on argumentation and justification. This ensures that all students are engaged with focused curricula that emphasis rigorous learning habits. As a result, the percentage of students at proficient on the middle school level, and the percentage of students earning a 75% or better on the ELA Regents have risen from 57% to 70%.
- School leaders' informed and purposeful use of resources and time are aligned to the school's instructional goals and support growth in student learning. (1.3)
 - Aligned with the school's goal of creating functional teacher teams that focus on curriculum and instruction, administration has scheduled all teachers for structured professional collaborations. In support of the high school and college

readiness initiative, the administrative team works with teachers during structured professional collaboration periods to analyze student work and revise academic tasks in order to consistently embed the school's instructional focus. In response to an analysis of student data and the school's focus on meeting the youth development needs of students, the administration programmed all students for advisory, during which a cohort of students, under the guidance of a teacher build community and are intimately supported toward reaching academic and personal goals. In addition, the school offers elective programs that target both academics and the Arts. These administrative decisions and actions have led to increased teacher understanding of how to design rigorous academic tasks that have led to improvements in student outcomes, as evidenced by an increase in the number of students scoring a proficient on the "Intensives and Exhibitions."

- Teachers gather and analyze a variety of formative, interim and summative data to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and target instructional decisions to accelerate student achievement. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams meet regularly and use the time in a variety of ways such as co-planning, looking at student work, "kid talk" and data analysis. Interventions for targeted students including subgroups, as well as plans for professional development to improve pedagogy are priorities that teams and the administration have adopted. For example, one team developed a mathematics diagnostic test to be used during the summer session while another team used "promotion in doubt" data to develop specific interventions for 8th grade students to be used during the Wednesday intensives and advisory time. As a result of the team work being done, there has been an increase in the passing rates on Regents exams and scholarship reports.
- Effective classroom observation feedback using a research based framework has resulted in improvement of teacher practice and a system of staff development to support teachers' growth. (4.1)
 - The administration uses an integrated framework, B.E.S.T. (Behaviors Expected of Students and Teachers), collaboratively developed with the Network team and the school, that is aligned with both the Danielson Rubric and the citywide expectations to provide feedback to teachers from informal observations. Feedback highlights strengths and weaknesses in teacher practice and provides next steps for improvement. Next steps are aligned closely with the development of learning targets for individual students and the ongoing evaluation of assessment and grading practices. Trends and patterns from these short, frequent cycles of classroom observations are used to guide professional development. This ensures that teachers understand which practices are working and which need to be improved as well how to improve them. As a result, professional development choices are targeted and result in improved teacher pedagogy.
- In partnership with the school's Advisory Board, the opportunities for a wide range of real world learning experiences and opportunities are offered to students, helping to prepare them for personal and academic success. (4.4)
 - Post-secondary readiness and preparedness extend beyond the guidance, college advisement and advisory systems that are in place for all learners. Many opportunities are afforded to students through the solid partnership with the school's founding advisory board. The advisory board successfully matches the school with partners who raise money and secure opportunities for students such as, community service, summer internships and college experiences, "Learning

Leaders,” YMCA (Camp Beckett) and more to support academic and emotional growth during regular school hours and after school as well as real world learning experiences outside of the school environment. Students state that these opportunities add to their understanding and vision of college expectations and career opportunities.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teachers’ planning to further enhance and support higher levels of student engagement for all learners differentiated at their entry points. (1.2)
 - Although there is alignment with teacher practice and the school’s belief that students should be actively engaged, the quality and intensity of questions and teaching strategies is not strategic in all classrooms. The strategies employed to meaningfully and consistently engage students does not result in maximized thinking. In some classrooms student groups were engaged in analysis, discussion and debate, based on students’ learning targets and the use of tiered questioning while in others students were not grouped using this approach. Instead, students were grouped based on pre-tiered questions and there was little explicit connections between learning targets and the lesson being taught. Consequently, students most in need of support and those at the high end of proficiency were not always appropriately challenged and engaged in rigorous work, thereby limiting accelerated growth for all learners as evidenced in student work products and classroom participation.
- Ensure that the monitoring and tracking of goals at the school and teacher levels result in clear and timely communication of learning expectations in order to help students meet their learning targets. (3.3)
 - Administration and staff use interim data to monitor and track school and student goals. However, all teacher teams do not yet consistently adjust goals for subgroups of students based on the interim data they gather and analyze. In addition, while parents and guardians receive progress reports for their child, the granular information used to track goals is not shared in a timely manner. This prevents families from having a clear understanding of what their children know and don’t know, thus they are not always able to explicitly help their child reach their next learning step.
- Strengthen shared professional collaborations so that teacher teams systematically analyze student work and data to further enhance pedagogical practice. (4.2)
 - All teachers are on functioning teacher teams. Some teams are guided by teacher leaders, while some are led by the administration. However, most of the inquiry work of the teams is just beginning to take shape as they are now moving toward analyzing student work for a cohort of students they are responsible for. In addition, teams are starting to develop academic tasks that are cognitively more challenging. While the school is moving in this direction, the absence of on-going shared collaboration hinders opportunities for some teachers to engage in reflective practice to guide improvement in their pedagogy to accelerate student outcomes.
- Refine the practice of evaluating and monitoring teachers’ structured learning experiences to identify strengths and weaknesses and leadership development in order to inform professional development offerings to impact teacher practice. (5.4)

- Teachers are engaged in varied professional learning experiences, including teacher inquiry work, planning teams and study groups. In addition, the school's governance body, which is comprised of the administrative team, data specialist, teacher leaders and dean, meets to discuss the progress of teachers' instructional growth. However, the administration and the governance body do not consistently use student data to determine the effectiveness of collaborative learning structures, professional development offerings and capacity building. In the absence of consistent data analysis the administration's ability to inform the effectiveness of professional development and capacity building aligned to teacher team initiatives, is impeded.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Bronx Academy of Letters	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1..2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X	
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X	
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X	
1..4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X	
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X	
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X	
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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