

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

South Bronx Preparatory: A College Board School

07X221

**360 East 145 Street
Bronx
NY 10454**

Principal: Ellen Reddon Flanagan

Dates of review: March 12–13, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

South Bronx Preparatory: A College Board School is a middle and high school with 631 students from six through grade twelve. The school population comprises 28% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-12 in the middle school was 91.5% and in the high school 87.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school community is unified in its efforts to create a safe and supportive culture that results in students who are collaborative, proud of their school, and who push each other to be academically and personally responsible. (1.4)
 - The school's theory of action: "Acquiring Knowledge, Building Support, and Creating Organization" focuses on how adults and students learn and is a coherent message reflected in teacher observation feedback, lesson and unit plans, and classroom routines. For example, when students are in heterogeneous "Support" groups, it is understood that they construct meaning together, ask questions of each other, and help each other to complete tasks. Bulletin boards across the school that celebrate student accomplishments, such as credit accumulation, work products, and Regents exam pass rates, promote student-to-student discussions wherein they push each other to focus on improving their grades. This creates a positive environment since students are as invested in improving academic outcomes as the faculty and parents. One student shared that when she came to the school she had very little knowledge of English, "yet my teachers never gave up on me." In classrooms and meetings, students readily share how this school honors their voice in maintaining the collaborative spirit that defines the school's purpose. For example, two students approached the principal to propose a peer-tutoring center so that, as one student shared, "Students can come to me for help no matter what grade they are in." This results in students who are invested in each other and the school's success. This also leads to a safe and respectful school tone where all stakeholders feel a part of improving learning outcomes.
 - The South Bronx Preparatory community understands the connection between students' personal growth and academic habits. For example, one teacher team analyzed assessment data and realized how little experience middle school students had with lengthy assessments. This led to a collaborative effort to explicitly teach students how to build stamina and resulted in increased exam completion rates. Students show empathy toward each other in and out of the classroom and there is abundant evidence that students hold themselves responsible for contributing to a culture where everyone is a part of academic improvement. As one student stated, what makes the school unique is that "my peers help me know." Students take their peer's academic and personal growth as seriously as they do their own. Parents also shared that they receive ongoing communications from the school to keep them apprised of their child's progress, and are welcomed to "pop in" to classrooms to get a deeper understanding of how their child's academic and personal growth develop over time. This leads to a unified effort by the school community to promote academic and personal behaviors that will prepare students for college and career.
- School leaders strategically communicate high academic expectations for adults and students that are understood by all stakeholders resulting in a school culture that promotes college and career readiness. (3.4)
 - The principal communicates high expectations to her staff by serving as a model herself; her Principal Performance Review (PPR) goals are on display

in the front lobby. The goal for integrating the Common Core Learning Standards into all content area classrooms is clearly articulated. Leadership provides teachers with ongoing and actionable feedback for supporting the lowest third learners, and involves parents in their children's academic progress. For teachers, observation records show clear feedback trails that lead to improved practice in questioning and Common Core-aligned lessons. In addition to frequent feedback, teachers set goals, regularly review student scholarship and progress data in teams and with school leaders, and are held accountable for their students' gains. In the "Midyear Conversation," teachers reflect upon their practice, review their progress, and, in collaboration with leadership, determine next steps in chosen Danielson competencies. This results in teachers who are held accountable for making consistent adjustments to practice to support all learners with more challenging tasks and the necessary supports such as: annotating texts; conferencing; guided questions; graphic organizers; and protocols for collaboration, that align to the schools' goals, and exemplary college retention rates.

- Communication regarding student progress is ongoing as one parent shared, "My son cannot tell me he has no homework because I know that he does." Parents understand that the Common Core Learning Standards require more of their students and strengthen their readiness for post-secondary work. To this end, parents spoke about the many ways that their children receive additional support from teachers and school leadership. When students face challenges, it is "so easy to arrange a meeting." One parent shared how she learns alongside her son, "When my [special education] child needs additional support, we sit with the teacher and the paraprofessional and go over the work. The teacher is showing me too." In addition, the parent coordinator invites parents to attend workshops to keep them updated on college and career readiness expectations and to maintain the strong partnership between the school leadership and families. This results in parents who are informed partners in their children's path to higher education.
- Across disciplines curricula and academic tasks are consistently aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with supports in place so that all learners engage in higher order thinking. (1.1)
 - The school focuses on the instructional shifts necessary for implementing the Common Core Learning Standards. This is evident in more rigorous tasks integrated into unit and lesson plans requiring students to use evidence to support claims, to learn how to navigate complex texts and answer text-dependent questions across content areas. In one sixth grade English language arts class, students worked with Mark Twain's "Whitewashing the Fence" to determine how the author's use of descriptive phrases reveals character intent. In a seventh grade science class, where the "learning intention" was to learn about how parts of the eye contribute to vision and color perception, text-dependent prompts such as "If someone does not have rod cells and cone cells how will this impact what the person sees?" and "Pick one part of the eye and explain how its structure relates to its function" led to students applying what they learned to a patient with "undamaged eye muscles, cornea, retina, and lens who cannot see out of his left eye." In collaboration with peers, students had to determine what was causing the problem and why. In a seventh grade English language arts class, students worked with text-dependent questions to infer a character's inner thoughts based on her actions and words. Students studied and discussed examples of "weak" and "strong" answers in evidence-based responses before working

on the task. One student shared that in analyzing literature, it is not about whether “you are right or wrong,” but about finding support for “your analysis.” In an Earth Science lesson, the teacher planned for students to view a video to determine the impact of either a Japanese earthquake or a volcano on more than just the surrounding areas, and in a senior English class, students were given the choice to write three, five or seven to nine-page literary critiques of Hamlet. The teacher shared that all but one of her students chose the last option. In all of these classrooms, students, particularly special education students, worked together and supported each other in preparing for the rigors of college and career as reflected in the school’s 89% four-year graduation rate.

- School leaders strengthen teacher practice through frequent observation feedback cycles and instructional rounds that improves instruction throughout the school. (4.1)
 - The administration focuses on student engagement, assessment of learning, and classroom environment based on the Danielson Teaching Framework. This vision for school improvement builds upon years of work using the *Santa Cruz Mentoring* model. Teachers receive frequent feedback on practice that is augmented by the instructional rounds process where teachers take ownership of the process by providing feedback to each other. When teachers wanted to understand how the Danielson competencies translate into practice, the two instructional leads revised the rounds observation tool to include specific strategies to look for as they visit classrooms. One teacher reflected after the second set of rounds, “I received helpful advice for ways to engage more students... they can do more ‘think-pair-share’ to communicate ideas and evidence in groups.” This resulted in teachers presenting new and effective instructional strategies to their teams in “knowledge sharing sessions.” All observation reports include strengths and next steps that lead to improved practices such as increased wait time and including ongoing checks for understanding during instruction. Several teachers claim that the supportive feedback helped them move from “front of the room teaching” to “student-directed” practices. As a result, the school’s belief in feedback shapes the professional development calendar and is leverage that drives school improvement and teacher development.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand upon instructional practices and academic tasks so that all lessons are challenging, provide multiple entry points for all learners, and extend student thinking that are reflected in cognitively demanding student work products. (1.2)
 - Students constructing knowledge together and supporting each other is a core belief that is evident across classrooms. Teachers plan lessons so that students work collaboratively to access new information from a text, find out together that there may be multiple ways to solve a problem, share responses to guided questions that support reading complex texts, and work in stations to review information. For example, in an eleventh grade English language arts class, students came to consensus regarding the one or two sentences most essential to understanding perspective in a slave narrative. This led to students posting and viewing classmates’ choices, and noting on post-its how each sentence connected to the characters, events, or conflicts” in the novel, *Kindred*. In many classrooms “Success Criteria” was posted, such as: “I can

annotate effectively by finding key information and big ideas.” “I can depend on a text to inform my discussion and thinking.” In a math classroom, exit slip data informed student groupings from “most basic” and “more conceptual” to “understands the abstract.” Open-ended prompts accompany rigorous tasks and provide an entry point for most learners. Although students of all ability levels support and learn from each other, as one student affirmed, “I know I can learn when I can explain it to someone who doesn’t understand,” and this is a belief held by all teachers and students, not all learners are pushed to generate thought around their own high level questions, thus, limiting greater coherence across classrooms of students demonstrating higher order thinking in work products.

- Expand the work of structured professional collaborations to deepen integration of the Common Core Learning Standards aligned to school goals with a continued emphasis on improving instructional practice to engage all learners. (4.2)
 - Teacher team inquiry work is an integral part of the school culture, and aligns to the school’s goals for improving teacher practice using the Danielson framework, and for integrating the Common Core Learning Standards into curricula. Teams track student progress using a variety of assessments: Acuity, Slosson, and Design Your Own (DYO) in order to adjust curricula so that students have ongoing support to improve performance. For example, teachers in the ninth grade team examined a sampling of persuasive writing pieces that included work from special education students. Using a protocol for looking at student work they surfaced gaps and identified instructional next steps. The group noted that students struggled with organization, a “lack of cohesion” and “claims that lacked evidence to support them.” One student, it was noted, did not appear to have a “grasp on what a claim is.” The team brainstormed possible next steps: a focus on transitions; teaching ways to outline prior to writing; and providing sentence starters for additional support. In the eighth grade team meeting, the team analyzed Design Your Own (DYO) writing assessment data using a “What, So What, Now What” protocol to surface gaps. The findings: students showed progress in organization; needed more support with academic vocabulary and with providing more detailed evidence in their writing. The team agreed to a focus on vocabulary, to track progress, and to target how well students understood and applied new vocabulary in the next assessment. Both team discussions focused on improving student outcomes through instructional shifts, tracking student progress, and meeting the needs of student learners. However, the Common Core expectations are not always integrated into the instructional capacity of teachers that is strengthened during these team collaborations. As a result, school-wide instructional coherence is hampered thus limiting further increases in student achievement for all learners.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: South Bronx Preparatory: A College Board School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?			X				
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?			X				
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?				X			
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed