



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning
2013-2014

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Bard High School Early College

High School 696

**525 EAST HOUSTON STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10002**

Principal: Michael Lerner

**Dates of review: Jan 15 - 16, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bard High School Early College is a high school and early college with 560 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 14% Black, 19% Hispanic, 48% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers integrate the instructional shifts across content areas within lessons and academic tasks in ways that exceed Common Core expectations, thus promoting college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - The school prides itself in its already strong and well-established exemplary curricular practices modeled after Bard College's seminar sequence. Students enroll in Seminar for year one and year two, (these early college grades equate in sequence to junior and senior years in traditional schools), which focus on critical analysis of prominent works in literature and philosophy. The Seminar develops students' ability to think and write about and discuss insights in a manner reflective of college level work. Administrators and faculty at the Bard High School Early College (BHSEC), have also spent a considerable amount of time over the past several years developing courses, lessons, units of study, and lessons that reflect full integration of the instructional shifts embedded in Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) across content areas. For example, lesson plans in English emphasize the value of text-based evidence in argument through the development of essays that require complex thesis statements and close textual analysis. In math, a review of lessons and tasks reflect the shift referred to as "focus" by ensuring that all students take one to two semesters of a standards-based mathematical modeling course as foundational learning as part of a three-year coherent sequence emphasizing functions, algebra, and geometry. Units of study in social studies and science also reflect State standards and instructional shifts. For example, social studies reading and writing assignments are almost exclusively based on non-fiction texts, which foster students' development of content knowledge and academic vocabulary. The school's work to ensure a thoughtful and progressively complex curriculum that prepares all students for college level work is systematically reviewed by teachers and administrators and revised to meet students' needs as evidenced by increasingly rigorous tasks. Recent review of math achievement data revealed a need to reinforce foundational work around mathematical modeling. As a result, a course was added to provide deep, focused work around conceptual understanding and strategic application of mathematical functions to problem solving. Data show that the school's curricula also support academic success of all learners as evidenced by 97% of all students graduating annually and moving into four-year colleges. As a result, the school's programs of study and courses are well aligned to key standards and provide rich learning experiences that foster the development of students' critical and analytical thinking skills and promote college and career readiness.
- Across classrooms, teaching practices reflect the school's philosophy that students learn best when engaged in meaningful opportunities to think and write critically, resulting in high levels of student discussion and participation. (1.2)
 - Lessons observed consistently exemplify what school leaders and faculty at BHSEC believe, that a clear focus on writing and thinking undergird the facilitation of high-level discussions and help to prepare students for the rigorous demands of secondary and post-secondary work. In order to support student development of their writing and analytical thinking, the

school year begins with teachers, including professors from the school's partner, Bard College, facilitating discussions by posing questions that activate individual and student-to-student exploration of information, personal reflections, and understanding of new concepts or strategies to problem solve. For example in one math lesson, students described why an algebraic representation for solving a problem was best. In a mathematical modeling class, students determined whether a mathematical expression demonstrated the chaos theory in logistics. In a Socratic seminar, sophomores participated in a student led discussion exploring symbolism and reflecting on personal connections after having read Virginia Woolf's, *To the Lighthouse*. Students not only answered questions but also extended their own thinking and that of their peers by providing examples from text to support their contributions. In an Engineering class, students participated in a final analysis of the quality of their collaboratively designed and constructed model bridges by testing the amount of pressure and weight they could endure. Students defended their rationale for selecting particular designs and materials, making references to formulas and concepts in physics as their foundational premise for decisions. In all lessons, teachers facilitate student learning and rely less on frontloading information. Students across subject areas are comfortable asking each other for assistance and explaining their thinking to their peers. Tasks also demand that students provide evidence of their work and as in science classrooms, in which groups collaborated on projects such as the "Use of DNA Barcoding to Identify Invasive Species in the East River". Students presented findings in a more formal manner including descriptions of research, methodology, and support for conclusions. As a result across classrooms and disciplines lessons foster high levels of analytical thinking, discussion, and student ownership of learning.

- All members of the school community consistently communicate high expectations for learning and excellence and provide supports for students and their families as they progress towards attainment of those expectations. (3.4)
 - Students, faculty, administrators, and parents, clearly articulate that BHSEC expectations are high and exceed those of schools they had previously attended or worked in. These expectations include that every student will graduate with the skills and knowledge reflective of an accelerated course of studies that lead to a High School diploma and 60 college credits, and an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts from Bard College. This expected outcome is fully supported by the culture for teaching and learning that permeates the environment at the school. Teachers are guided and supervised by school leaders with extensive teaching experiences who provide clear expectations for pedagogical and professional practice. Via ongoing verbal and written communication, team meetings, and meetings with the principal, teachers get feedback about instructional practice and student progress. Furthermore, the Danielson framework competencies are being used formally this year to describe the expectations for highly effective pedagogy that support student ownership of learning. As a result, teachers interviewed, describe the expectation as one of releasing the learning to students through high-level discussions and meaningful work products. Students are also aware of the part they play in their education and are encouraged to, as one student stated, "take bold steps" to share their thinking and inquire about others' contributions to a discussion. Advisors and faculty from Bard College are readily available and in a caring and motivating way assist students in tracking their progress towards graduation and beyond. Students say the accessibility of staff and administrators makes them feel supported and capable of rising to the challenges of the rigorous curriculum. One student described how the acceleration of her

learning was made possible through self-generated topics for an independent research project that allows her to explore outside of the traditional course sequence to pursue interests that may lead to career opportunities and further college work. Parents interviewed state that they appreciate the commitment of the school to their children and appreciate the consistent communication of progress via email, phone calls, and in-person meetings. They articulated their understanding of how they “play an integral part” in supporting their children’s success. The college advisory program also provides ongoing support in the college application process including selection, scholarships, financial aid, and course of study. This support and clarity in communication of high standards has yielded steady annual credit accumulation rates upward of 90% for all cohorts of students, a 97.6% four-year graduation rate, and a 98.4% College readiness rate on the school’s annual progress report. This unwavering belief that students will achieve high levels of success both at BHSEC and beyond is embraced by all members of the community and creates an environment where students are supported in accomplishing their goals.

- School leaders strategically use data from observations of teacher practice and analysis of student work to provide actionable feedback to teachers, resulting in improvement of practice and student achievement. (4.1)
 - Over the past four years, teachers have received targeted and meaningful feedback about the strengths and areas for development in their instructional practice. Administrators and faculty members have engaged in ongoing cycles of school wide classroom observation, and targeted feedback around the implementation of best instructional practices as evidenced by feedback letters. Well-planned professional development plans support improvement of practice. One particular area of feedback across observations is around improvement of questioning and facilitation of discussion. Aligned with the expectations of the Danielson framework, which is fully implemented at the school, written feedback to teachers aptly captures recommendations for asking higher order questions, increasing wait time, and encouraging student participation. A robust calendar of frequent informal and formal observations for the demands of the evaluation system has enabled each teacher to be visited at least twice by administrators thus far. Teachers stated they receive feedback in a timely manner and that allows them to address adjustments to their practice in support of student learning. The principal also meets with teachers to review student work and progress and explores strategies with teachers as to how to support student learning. As a result of this ongoing, meaningful, verbal, and written feedback to teachers about their practice, pedagogy is advanced across the school as evidenced by observation report data and improved use of effective questioning strategies in lessons.
- Across grades and content areas, teacher teams effectively engage in the analysis of student work and instructional practice to inform key decisions that result in improved learning outcomes for students. (4.2)
 - Teacher teams meet weekly with grade level or content area colleagues and work collaboratively, using both informal and formal self-reflection and consultancy protocols to discuss concerns about particular aspects of their subject area, or progress and performance of students they share. All teachers including faculty from Bard College and occasionally other staff such as college advisors, academic deans, or administrators across the school engage in these frequent, effective, professional collaborations that enable staff to make adjustments to their practice and/or their curriculum. For example, on the Americas team, teachers provided suggestions to their

colleague about a modification to an end-of-term assessment after engaging with the task themselves and giving warm and cool feedback about its design. Teachers state they look forward to their time together as it has also built coherence across their classrooms. For example, as the chemistry team shared, they attribute improved student learning to these opportunities to share best practices saying it has enabled them to provide consistent and clear expectations about the structures and the work in their classrooms. Teachers also state that the administration has given them freedom to explore their students' needs and trusts their expertise in finding the best way to address them. As a result there is an embedded level of teacher leadership in curriculum design and lesson planning as well as in determining how to support the diverse needs of their students. This organic, school wide culture of shared accountability and collaboration has fortified teacher practice and improved learning as evidenced by rigorous tasks that result in meaningful student work products.

What the school needs to improve

- Further refine assessment practices, including the ongoing checks for understanding and analysis of student work so that instructional and curricular adjustments effectively meet discreet learning needs of students. (2.2)
 - Teachers analyze individual student and grade level student assessment data as part of their teacher teamwork and individual planning process. Teams use protocols and rubrics that allow them to assess the quality of student writing, accuracy of responses, and gaps in student understanding or in lessons. As a result of this careful analysis, for example, the Chemistry team has made several adjustments to how vocabulary for certain units of study is introduced as well as determined strategies for students who may confuse certain science concepts as evidenced by patterns of responses found through error analysis. Similarly, teachers on the Americas team analyzed student work presented by one teacher, which required students to identify the best complex thesis statement and provide reasons for their selection. As a result of student work and data analysis, lesson plans and learning activities are refined to meet student needs. In actual lessons, however, the use of checks for understanding at the point of instruction is sometimes missing, For example, in one math class, there were moments when students required re-teaching and may have needed clarification of the task. In other classrooms, support came from peers and in others, students stated they would get help after school. Thus, in some classrooms, there are some missed opportunities to refine or redirect students' conceptual understanding during lessons, hindering further acceleration of learning for some students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Bard High School Early College	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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?				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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?				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	