



Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists

08X269

**928 Simpson Street
Bronx
NY 10459**

Principal: David Vazquez

Dates of review: April 8-9, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Timothy Behr

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists is an Intermediate-High School with 539 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 21% Black, 77% Hispanic, and 2% composing of White, Asian, and American Indian or Alaskan Native students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012- 2013 was 85.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school utilizes variety of relevant data across subjects to provide staff and students with feedback about students' performance as well as to inform instruction and adjust curricula in order to meet students' learning needs. (2.2)
 - The middle school administers quarterly performance based assessments which are Common Core aligned in all content areas to inform the cabinet and teachers of students' academic strengths and weakness. Based on the results, the school is prioritizes improving student academic vocabulary, argumentative writing skills, and numerical fluency. For science students apply previously learned concepts to complete lab reports. In social studies document based writing assignments inform students' mastery of content. At the high school level teachers create and use assessments which are aligned to State Regents to evaluate student performance. All teachers use a content specific grading policy to determine student outcomes. Rubrics are used across grades and content areas to carefully monitor student performance and progress. Teachers use this data to adjust instruction and provide students with feedback about their performance on assessments and other assignments. For example, an English language arts lesson that did not consistently check for understanding was modified by having students verbally demonstrate mastery of text features. As a result, administration and teachers have a greater understanding of student performance and make effective adjustments to curriculum and instruction that address students' academic needs, as evidenced by the majority of students passing their classes on the most recent report card.
- The principal, in collaboration with network and district administrators, makes key organizational decisions that are in alignment to the school's instructional goals, contributing to improved instruction and student performance. (1.3)
 - The school's priority is to improve the impact of the instructional core, teacher supervision, and student and parent involvement. Thus, administrators team up so that their assessment of classroom instruction provides timely feedback and includes monitoring of students' academic progress to inform professional development. Currently, the school is prioritizing teachers' questioning skills, student engagement, and the continued use of assessment to inform instruction so the principal uses strategic scheduling to provide teachers with focused time for teamwork and targeted professional development activities that build their capacity, particularly in these competencies. Consequently, students are performing better on performance based assessments and other class assignments, as evidenced by the work contained in their portfolios. Integrated co-teaching classes support the social and academic growth of English language learners and students with disabilities. The principal's decision to create a dean of student life and culture has resulted in a decrease in incidents as per online occurrence reports. Scheduling decisions ensure advisory periods which enhance student to student and staff and student relationships. An assistant principal for organization monitors attendance, programming, and supervision of special education contributing to improved year to date attendance for both middle (4%) and high school (7%) students. A newly hired full-time college counselor coordinates a college

office to inform students of the college application process and specific college academic specialties. The school obtained a licensing agreement with FuelEd an Online educational company that supports high school credit recovery and offers standards based courses to address students' multiple learning styles. As a result, students' college and career readiness is supported through exploration activities in core content areas and especially through the college office, which is accessible for all students, and has contributed to 95% of the current 2014 high school graduating class being accepted to a two or four year college.

- The school uses the Danielson Framework to provide feedback on teacher practice, with effective monitoring of pedagogy to deepen instructional practices. (4.1)
 - Administrators have conducted cycles of formal and informal observations of teachers and all individual conferences and observations completed year to date have been entered into Advance, the teacher performance data management portal. Feedback to pedagogues encourages reflection on practice, with one to one conferences with teachers to highlight their strengths, areas of need and next steps. The network talent coach is part of the feedback loop, helping to clarify expectations for improvement in teacher practice and ensure successful implementation of next steps recommended by administrators for individual teachers, especially new teachers. To strengthen comprehension of the recommendations, the principal hired an independent instructional consultant to norm the school's collective expectations around the Danielson Framework. In addition, administrators' norming practices have led to greater teacher comprehension of the Danielson rubric and Common Core standards as tools for providing feedback that supports the development of strong pedagogy across the school. Teachers also participated in a September Faculty Institute to establish a common language and shared understanding of best instructional practices to promote their professional growth. Thus multiple forms and sources of feedback have empowered teachers to become more familiar with the Danielson Framework for Teaching, which has resulted in improvement in teacher pedagogy, particularly in targeted competencies such as questioning and discussion skills and the use of formative assessments to drive instruction.
- The school has articulated clear goals to improve classroom practice and has aligned its professional development plan to promote collaboration among staff members to support student learning and pedagogical growth. (3.1)
 - The Measures of Student learning growth model assessments are aligned to the Common Core standards to address the school goal of improving the quality of assessment and instruction. The goal of strengthening faculty capacity to disaggregate data to identify student's strengths and areas for improvement is accomplished through the analysis of baseline midterm data in all core content areas at the middle school level. Writing is evaluated via students' use of evidence, transitions, structure, conclusion and conventions. For social studies, the school analyzes the creation of an argument, including organization, counter claims, and use of documents from primary and secondary sources. In science, students are tracked for progress by demonstrating use of a hypothesis, designing procedures, and supporting claims to complete research using the scientific method. For math, students are tracked for the ability to apply learned concepts to solve problems. High school students are tracked throughout their four years to

ensure they are earning the appropriate number of credits per year to graduate on time. Each academic core content area has a liaison who provides one-on-one coaching for colleagues, including analysis of units, peer visitations and examination of student work. Liaisons are trained to lead and facilitate meetings and assist with planning to implement Common Core aligned units of instruction. Consequently, teachers' ability to set and achieve instructional goals has improved, as evidenced by unit plans and results of formal and informal assessments.

What the school needs to improve

- Promote greater consistency in planning to implement rigorous Common Core aligned curricula to meet the varied needs of students. (1.1)
 - In consultation with the cabinet the principal selected *Expeditionary Learning* for its middle school English language arts curriculum and *Go Math* for grades 6 through 8 as these curriculums are aligned to the Common Core. The school selected the City University of New York at Home English language arts and Math curricula to jump start the process of ensuring that course work for the high school students is aligned to the rigorous expedition of college and the demands of Regents exams which they are expected to take. However, curricula does not reflect attention to the instructional shifts in all content areas, as the school wide instructional focus of using evidence in writing and verbal assignments is not consistently evidenced by student work products across grades and subject classes. In addition, unit plans do not show consistent evidence of rigorous tasks across classrooms. For example, a science task required students to complete a Venn diagram just using direct reference. An English language arts lesson plan showed that the teacher launched independent reading of nonfiction, yet the teacher informed me that she had not yet determined students' independent reading levels. As a result, teachers are not consistently designing lessons and units with tasks that address the unique needs of the diverse student body.
- Deepen the coherence of teaching strategies to ensure that all students make progress via challenging learning experiences. (1.2)
 - The school's core beliefs about how students learn best are centered on rigor and relationships. The principal stated that the rigor in classroom activities is aligned with the Danielson domains of questioning, engagement and assessment. However, some lessons showed learning tasks that did not contribute to rigorous learning experiences for all students, resulting in several students being off task. Further, the incorporation of multiple entry points to support students' diverse learning needs and styles is an inconsistent practice across classroom so lessons show uneven levels of student engagement from classroom to classroom. Explicit instructional strategies that promote higher order thinking were also not evident across classrooms. For example, students in an English language arts class were completing an activity regarding text features, a topic which was previously taught and understood by students, as evidenced by most of the students completing the task with minimal difficulty and stating that they had done it before. As a result, not all teachers are providing instruction that consistently incorporates demanding tasks that result in higher order thinking by all students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists	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