

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Bronx School of Law and Finance**

**High School 284**

**99 Terrace View Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10463**

**Principal: Jessica Goring**

**Dates of review: January 15 – 16, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Leslie Miller Chislett**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Bronx School of Law and Finance is a high school with 416 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 38% Black, 64% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 82.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Faculty plan curricula and academic tasks that align to Common Core (CC) and content-area standards and incorporate the instructional shifts to build coherence across subjects and grades, and promote college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
  - Most subject area teachers in all grades created unit maps and meet regularly to integrate the CC instructional shifts into lesson plans. This work is supported by the English language arts team who assist teachers in other content areas with emphasizing the CC Anchor Standards for Literacy, and is also bolstered by network consultant coaches. Units feature relevant CC and State standards in English language arts (ELA), science, and social studies; include essential questions, key concepts, learning activities, academic vocabulary, and formative and summative assessment evidence sources. Some unit plans include rubrics along with options for students with disabilities (SWDs) and/or English language learners (ELLs). ELA units incorporate non-fiction texts consistent with the emphasis of the new standards. For example, an eleventh grade unit on the human condition that uses the literary text Of Mice and Men also uses primary source historical documents to build context such as music lyrics, photos, oral accounts, and other readings about the plight of migrant workers in the Great Depression. These units often culminate with a research presentation or writing project. For ninth and tenth grade students, New Visions' network CC-aligned math curricula, *Accessing Algebra through Inquiry (A2i)* is being adopted. These units begin with a pre-unit task, embed a project-like formative assessment mid-unit, and end with a post-unit task. Small group activities are used to deepen students' conceptual understanding and uncover misconceptions that need to be addressed. This work has purposefully furthered the school's emphasis on giving all student access to curricula that promotes college and career readiness.
  - Data on student performance and actual student work inform planning of curricula and academic tasks for all learners, including those in the lowest third in terms of credit accrual, students with disabilities and ELLs. For example, teacher teams review reading level data from ninth grade diagnostics, pre-unit math assessments and ELA performance-based assessments adopted as a Measure of Student Learning (MOSL). Performance assessments, revealing that teachers need to ensure more use of more complex grade-level texts and refine supports for students that struggle with forming claims and identifying textual evidence to support these claims, resulted in focusing on improving curriculum and instruction in all disciplines. "Horizontal teams" in math and science meet regularly to adjust tasks in CC-aligned units based on their knowledge of student current performance. In addition, curricula used in Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) and self-contained settings for students with disabilities reflects planning to engage the diversity of learners in discussion and assignments of grade-level texts ensuring all students access to rigorous CC-aligned curricula.
- Teachers create assessments and rubrics, and use on-going checks for understanding to make effective adjustments to curricula and instruction and provide feedback to students to meet their learning needs. (2.2)
  - Common assessments include standards-aligned performance tasks and rubrics such as for written argument, pre-unit formative math assessments, teacher-designed mid-terms, mock Regents exams, and/or end-of-semester exams. These

help teachers and their students understand learner progress in relationship to the standards, and expectations of NYS Regents' exams. Grading policies are determined by subject area departments and incorporate information from assignments, quizzes, tests, classroom discussion, and written projects that are often assessed with rubrics that make evaluation criteria visible to students. SKEDULA is used as an electronic grade book and assists teachers in aggregating assessment data to understand individual and class progress. Accordingly, teachers gain insight on how to adjust instruction to improve student success and use this information to provide actionable feedback to students and parents. Assessment information is also used at the grade team level to make important decisions such as assigning students to an honors ELA class or to receive support in the form of after-school tutoring or Saturday school. Consequently, teachers understand learner progress and thoughtfully involve students while making adjustments to address their needs.

- In the classes observed, it was common for teachers to circulate, observe, and question students engaged in group work to ascertain learner understanding and progress with the assignment. It was also common for students to be prompted by teachers to explain their reasoning to each other. For example, in an Integrated Collaborative Teaching math class, students were co-constructing a poster of their solutions for equations categorized as “graphing, elimination or substitution” and writing an explanation for their selected process. One teacher listened to each group of students explain their reasoning prompting some to rely on one another by checking for agreement among group members, while prompting another student group more directly by saying “Check your numbers in front of the variables”. The partner teacher worked with one small group, watching their decision making and asking students to consider where they could go for help. In an eleventh grade ELA class, students interpreted quotes from text and then after a class discussion, checked a partner’s response to the short answer question to see if their classmates’ interpretation was consistent with the meaning uncovered in the class discussion. Across classrooms teachers also use *Do Now* assignments, quick class surveys, exit slips, and student self- or peer- assessment with rubrics or checklists to assess understanding resulting in enhanced learning in keeping with instructional aims.
- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions for the use resources to support the school’s unique instructional vision and goals. (1.3)
  - The school leverages key partnerships with the National Academy Foundation (NAF) and Justice Resource Center to support its law and finance majors and to provide students learning experiences aligned with college and career readiness such as moot court, mock trial, interview, and resume preparation, lectures by professionals, trips to law firms and businesses, and internships. Working with members of the NYC finance community that serve on an advisory board, the school utilizes budgetary resources, NAF curriculum, and teacher professional development opportunities, to enhance its finance courses to result in career-focused learning experiences for students. Space is devoted to a “trading floor” for finance classes that is equipped with networked computers, Smart Board and a stock ticker with a running report of the prices and trading volume of various stock exchanges. New Visions Network coaches are utilized to strategically support professional learning in math, science, and social studies related to the CCLS, as well Danielson Framework strategies. In addition, Urban Teaching Residents from the network have been used to aid in special education settings. To further increase student credit accumulation and Regents pass rates, the school made it possible for students to earn more credits in a semester by offering extra classes, including online courses and after-

school classes. To boost literacy and rigor in ninth grade, a second English class--composition writing, a computer course, and Latin, were added to students' programs. Resources were used to fund Saturday day school with a particular emphasis on getting students to pass Regent exams with a score of 80 or higher, yielding an increase in the number of students passing the algebra-trigonometry and chemistry tests with that score. These decisions have produced curricular, instructional and program improvements that advance teaching and learning for all students.

- Adult and student schedules support school improvement goals. To sustain professional learning, common planning time is built into teachers' schedule ensuring horizontal grade-level teams and vertical department teams meet weekly to conduct inquiry, revise lesson plans and strategize to meet student personal needs. The school staggers the start and end time for under and upper classmen so freshmen and sophomore students arrive second period and attend physical education class first thing in the day producing a reduction in tardiness. Therefore, the thoughtful use of staff and student time is improving instruction and student engagement.
- Teacher teams engage in inquiry analyzing curriculum, assessments, and student work, to refine teacher practice and expand CCLS implementation, and they are given a voice in key decisions that advance learning across the school. (4.2)
  - The science and math vertical teams meet regularly with facilitation support from New Vision's coaches to plan lessons built around new curricula and the CC instructional shifts as well as to strategize to meet the needs of struggling students. Specifically, the math team examines student work from formative assessment tasks used in the new algebra A2i curriculum, determines misconception patterns and how to address student weakness. Teachers explain they have honed questions and rubrics and how group work is structured to reach every student. Staff observe students gaining fluency in using various approaches to solving equations and explaining their reasoning with detail. The science team works to plan the use of non-fiction primary and secondary source texts within units of instruction and labs to build students' knowledge of the content and ability to recognize scientific claims, cite supporting evidence from the text, and provide reasoning about how the evidence is tied to the claim. The concepts and literacy skills are assessed by rubrics in all grade levels. Each teacher is also tracking the progress of a group of a group of targeted students to evaluate the effectiveness of discipline-based literacy strategies. Using a student work analysis sheet, teachers systematically examine student written responses to questions. Overall, teachers note that their students are gaining vocabulary and learning to support their scientific analysis. As a result, teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups are advancing.
  - Numerous distributed leadership structures exist that have built teacher capacity and fostered shared decision-making on matters of school improvement. The Instructional Support Team comprised of teacher leaders from each grade level conducts learning walks through classrooms to observe trends in teacher practice and advise the administrations on professional development foci and other initiatives. The College Access Team has focused on supporting college aspirations and application preparation; the special education team works with the assistant principal to review individualized education plans (IEPs) and determine placement in appropriate services in the least restrictive environments. These structures foster teacher leadership and input into the school's direction and action planning for school improvement.

## What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the use of instructional strategies informed by the Danielson Framework and instructional shifts across classrooms to provide a wide array of entry points so that student discussions and work products reflect high levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
  - Teachers are working to implement strategies that align to the CC instructional shifts and scaffold instruction so students can engage with essential questions and concepts, analyze challenging texts, and incorporate new academic vocabulary into discussion. The principal explained that this requires teachers to formulate questions that prompt students to discuss their reasoned use of evidence from text. In keeping with this, in at least four classroom discussions observed, teachers asked students if they agreed or disagreed with their classmate's interpretation of the text and why or why not, and if they wanted to add on to what had already been said. However, those that responded were not prompted to support their responses with reasoned evidence from text. A notable exception to this was an eleventh grade ELA class where the focus seemed to explicitly target the development of students' skill in identifying evidence from multiple texts to support a theme. Typically whole group conversation in classrooms takes place between student being called on and the teacher only and about half of the students do not contribute to the discussion. The school is also prioritizing group work and structuring situations where students are allowed to "productively struggle" with challenging standards-aligned tasks. Currently, it is common for teachers in math and science to have students work in pairs or groups on a cooperative activity. For example, in a forensics science class students worked together to figure out how to measure and calculate the pattern of a simulated blood splatter, and in algebra students discussed quantitative and qualitative research techniques used within various professions and collaboratively created a poster to share their ideas. While students were enthusiastic about these activities, contribution to the cooperative task was uneven. Often group roles were not assigned and several members of a group were unsure of how to share the work. While instructional strategies derived from the Danielson Framework for Teaching and CC standards are being used to foster students' engagement in discourse and inquiry oriented tasks, currently across classrooms higher-order thinking skills and active participation for the majority of students are not consistently demonstrated in discussions and work products. Therefore, learning is limited for some students.
- Expand structures, professional development, and family outreach, to systemically ensure attendance supports, social-emotional learning experiences, guidance, and college advisement that impact all students' academic and personal success. (1.4)
  - Students describe the school culture as encouraging and supportive and their teachers as eager to see them succeed and go to college. Most students interviewed named a specific way they felt the school had help them mature personally. Several told how the school transformed their attitude towards school. Currently, the grade team structure allows for teachers to discuss student academic progress that is being impaired by social and emotional needs. Here attendance patterns are also noted and followed-up on with calls to parents of struggling students from the part-time attendance teacher or one of the grade-level teachers. Conferences with students and parents are scheduled as needed, as are referrals to the school's full- or part-time guidance counselors or clinic-based social worker. Information is shared verbally and online so the faculty can work to support students at-risk for failing. Presentations that foster healthy choices such as anti-bullying, and town hall forums that give student voice or explain college readiness happen each

semester within regularly scheduled classes and are delivered by the administrators, counselors or part time college adviser. Along with these initiatives, the principal has devised additional strategies to support student social and emotional needs such as identifying teacher grade advisers to call home and key personnel to occasionally conduct home visits. Currently, however, existing attendance supports, proactive social and emotional interventions, and college advisement, are not thoroughly addressing the outstanding needs of the student population as evidenced by the number of students chronically absent and at-risk for not graduating. In the absence of a more comprehensive, coherent set of structures and services, all students are not yet fully adopting positive academic and personal behaviors.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: <b>Bronx School of Law and Finance</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>