

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Bronx Writing Academy

Middle School 323

**270 E. 167th Street
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Kamar Samuels

Dates of review: January 22 - 23, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Dolores Esposito

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Writing Academy is a middle school with 490 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 36% Black, 62% Hispanic, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 86% 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 87.0 %.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The leadership and faculty ensure that curriculum is effectively aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) promoting coherence of practices across the school. (1.1)
 - The administrative team and staff have collaboratively designed curriculum units to ensure CCLS and the instructional shifts are incorporated across content areas. The English language arts units are interdisciplinary so that social studies concepts such as the Civil War are infused and strategies that require students to read complex texts and write using various sources of informational texts are part of the work. Adaptations have been made for English language learners and students with disabilities with instructional supports, graphic organizers, rubrics and well-thought out formative and culminating assessments. Additionally, the school has developed six units of study for each grade level, integrating the CodeX and CCLS standards, so that the needs of the students are met. The school has also adapted a new math program that organizes the priority standards, cluster emphasis, and domain. As a result, there is greater coherence across content areas and topics that create meaningful experiences for student learning, thus advancing college and career readiness.
 - Academic tasks are designed during vertical and horizontal team meetings so that all learners have access to the curriculum. Teachers share resources and strategies and scaffold tasks using visuals and graphic organizers that enable students to engage in grade level content. Teachers developed argumentative writing tasks across content areas that emphasize the use of text-based evidence to support the school-wide goal in writing. These tasks include questions that promote critical thinking skills and reflection. Students with individualized education plans delve into math tasks that require students to self-assess using criteria aligned to the rubric. As a result, these students are actively engaged in rigorous learning, recording their findings in task sheets created by teachers.
- The school uses common assessments that effectively align to the curricula to make instructional adjustments that improve student learning. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams develop and use common assessments that are well aligned to key standards and curricula. For example, they have developed rubrics for writing that enable teachers to gauge student's proficiency in writing across content areas, based on the CCLS. They have also developed cross-curricular and task specific rubrics, including some that are generated with students. This was evident in classrooms with English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) who made use of these tools to unpack the writing tasks that require them to provide evidence and make judgments in support of their claims. Data from these performance-based assessments as well as formative tasks and item analyses from periodic and summative are used to track growth and make instructional modifications. In addition, students engage in both self-assessment and peer editing to improve their work. Students analyze their assessments, reflect on misconceptions, and have an opportunity to revise their work. This has enabled teachers to norm their practices in writing and in provide targeted

feedback to students that improves their learning. As a result, students are able to identify their strengths and reflect on their areas of growth, which improves the quality of their writing, evident in folders.

- The leadership supports the development of teachers with frequent cycles of classroom observations to advance professional growth and reflection. (4.1)
 - The Bronx Writing Academy has been a pilot school for the Danielson Framework from the inception of this initiative Citywide. Teachers receive a wide range of feedback on classroom management, questioning techniques, and assessments for student learning. Written and oral feedback provides teachers with clear next steps on questioning techniques in support of the school goals. Student data and work are also discussed regularly during feedback sessions. New teachers also receive feedback and coaching strategies from the leadership and other mentors with clear next steps for improvement. They indicate “there is a culture of trust in the school that improves their teaching practices”. Hence, teacher development is enhanced which promotes reflection and deeper conversations amongst staff in a highly supportive environment.
- Teacher teams engage in focused collaborations that promote shared leadership and strengthen student learning across the school. (4.2)
 - Regularly scheduled pod meetings enable teacher teams to discuss student data, patterns, and trends, relative to analyses of student work across content areas. As a result, they adjust instructional tasks and revise the curriculum units to meet the needs of their students. Teachers developed argumentative writing units across content areas in support of the CCLS and incorporate strategies to develop academic vocabulary within these units. Additionally, they also share best practices for struggling students during small group instruction. Consequently, the school’s progress report reflects a score of an “A” and current progress of the bottom third of students is based on data charts shared by the principal and ELA teachers.
 - Pods meet frequently to ensure that the instructional shifts are embedded in the units of study in literacy and math. Teachers who collaborate regularly, formally and informally, make key decisions about curriculum choices, topics of interest, and selection of resources, along with administrative guidance and support. The use of a rubric for teacher team meetings informs the needs and relevance of professional development and teacher support. For example, based on their feedback, academic vocabulary and questioning techniques is a school-wide focus. Peer instructional coaches have also been added this year to support teacher development and enhance leadership skills. As a result, teachers are highly empowered to take risks in designing curriculum using the Understanding by Design framework and improving student-learning efforts in the school. The school has cultivated partnerships that promote teacher leadership opportunities, which also focuses on improved student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine teaching practices that foster cognitive engagement and inquiry for all learners resulting in meaningful student work products. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, a clear framework guides teaching and learning practices in the school. This is exemplified through the workshop model that embraces the components of the Danielson Framework and the instructional shifts. Teacher's lesson plans indicate the effort in planning for diverse student levels. They attempt to use technology to build background knowledge and visuals to provide additional supports. However, there is a lack of consistency with providing rigorous opportunities for learning that maximizes instructional time with appropriate supports for extensions and remediation. In some classrooms, teachers do most of the work upfront without providing sufficient time and choices for students to practice the strategies being taught. During classroom visits, students are involved in tasks or discussions that have not been properly scaffolded at their instructional level. Consequently, students cannot participate effectively in higher order thinking tasks and discussions. For example, if students are reading grade level texts without strategic lessons that support comprehension strategies, then students cannot read independently with confidence and fluency. This is evident for many students who are English language learners or students with disabilities who are not able to fully participate in classroom discussions. Small group instruction does not consistently target strategies that support struggling students when the whole class is doing the same work. As a result, there are limited opportunities for students to build reading fluency and comprehension strategies needed across content areas. Additionally, students are unable to consistently self-reflect or self-monitor which impacts the quality and quantity of work that they are able to do independently.
- Develop cohesive systems and structures that enable the school to effectively assess and evaluate the progress of goals that advance student achievement. (5.1)
 - School leaders and staff have structures to discuss instructional practices in the school through cabinet meetings, pod meetings, the School Leadership Team, and individual teacher meetings, throughout the year. During weekly meetings, data is reviewed and discussed. However, the school does not have an organized system to effectively review data relative to student progress in all content areas. Currently, there are many meetings across content areas with various constituents to review the progress of school level decisions around professional development, curricular choices, materials, assessment practices, and grading policies, leading to a strong practice in literacy. However, there are still uneven levels of effective progress monitoring systems for each of the content areas, which limits the school's ability to effectively address learning gaps across the grades; this is very evident in social studies and science. As a result, the school is unable to make timely adjustments to improve student-learning experiences moving them to higher proficiency levels. Although there has been significant progress in math and literacy, as evidenced by Progress Reports and formative assessments, overall the school's proficiency levels fall below the district's average and State targets, thus limiting the school's ability to meet the needs of all students effectively.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Bronx Writing Academy	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