

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Bronx Design and Construction Academy**

**High School 522**

**333 East 151 Street  
Bronx  
NY, 10451**

**Principal: Matthew Williams**

**Dates of review: March 19 - 20, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Bronx Design and Construction Academy is a high school with 429 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 28% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 84% of the students enrolled and girls account for 16%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 79.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- A school culture that exemplifies building of relationships fosters mutual respect and, establishes a peaceful and productive learning environment that contributes to the academic and personal growth of students and staff. (1.4)
  - The school's theory of action embraces community as the vehicle to drive its fundamental belief that students must have social-emotional assistance in place to achieve high academic standards. All school constituents are guided to live by the three key tenets of respect, responsibility, and reflection, in a guiding document known as the "BDCA Ways" that explicitly outlines each tenet. The school places great emphasis on respecting the individuality of and ensuring that every student has a meaningful relationship with at least one adult. Several structures contribute to knowing students well and fostering such trusting relationships. The distribution of students and teachers into groups known as pods provides a structure for teachers to share responsibility for the same students, and supports through frequent collegial collaboration a better understanding of their students and the ability to act in concert to address particular learning needs. Advisory teachers assume responsibility for monitoring and outreach on behalf of their designated student caseloads, and working with grade-level teams comprised of a guidance counselor and a dean, work to provide coherent delivery of support. Proactive counselors, pupil personnel and attendance teams, communicate within weekly "Kid Talk" meetings tackling both individual student and school wide concerns. Classroom teachers implement a guided discipline system emphasizing student cooperation, self-management, responsible decision-making, and disciplined work habits. Students are taught to assume responsibility for their actions by apology and restitution to the school community through mediation, meetings with students and staff, or in family counseling, as part of a restorative justice approach that focuses on the needs of the victims and offenders. Thus, even within disciplinary actions, student voice is encouraged. Additionally, choice in academic tasks, student advisory representatives, and on-going adult-student communication, provide opportunities for students to express their thinking. Based on students' suggestions at a student leadership retreat, the school has developed an active listening protocol as well as a peer mediation program. Scores ranging from .7 to .9 points are above average in every category on the annual New York City School Survey, put the school at 100% of peer range, and from 92.9 to 100 % in citywide range in every survey category, attesting to the school's achievement of a strong community and a healthy learning environment for both students and staff. Additionally, as the school prepares to grow to twelfth grade by next year, it remains focused on strengthening its counseling and personalization processes to ensure that students are known well, impacting positively on student behaviors. Efforts this year have resulted in more than a 2% increase in attendance as compared to the same time period as last year, and a reduction of student removals by two thirds, while the school population has increased by one third, evidence of the school's focused emphasis on a culture that supports youth development.

- Strategic use of resources supports daily learning and long-term goals so that students achieve skills necessary for college and career. (1.3)
  - As the founding supervisor, the principal together with his team focused on providing a broader pathway for student success by creating a Career and Technical Education (CTE) school that offers students a choice of five trade career apprenticeships. Thoughtful planning and investigative research contributed to the strategic decision to blend technical and academic education to prepare students for the new industry standards of sustainability, such as in creating green environments, in which trades peoples' understanding of higher-level math and science is critical. The school partners with industry leaders and organizations such as Habitat for Humanity so that all students experience eight visits to active construction sites, four assemblies given by experts in their field, and complete internships of 200 hours in a field related to their CTE strand. Thus, students obtain on-the-job experience, learn key skills to acquire advanced entry-level positions, and gain a better understanding of the trajectory of career advancement in their chosen field in order to make informed career choices. Additionally, the school helps students stay on track through a partnership with East Side Settlement House, which provides five counselors who complete two check-ins per trimester with each student, and are an integral part of the grade level teams working with teachers, two social workers and a college advisor. Furthermore, the administration schedules hour-long periods that enable the sustained study and additional time-on-task for remediation, enabling students to successfully navigate courses. The principal budgets purposefully to reduce student-to-teacher ratio to encourage greater opportunity for students to make connections with adults and enabling teachers to help students develop self-efficacy, persistence, and communication skills. One student, in introducing himself before speaking to the reviewer, prefaced his statements by stating with confidence, "I am a plumber..." Projects such as those of the school's energy club earned the school second place last year and first place this year in an international competition in Abu Dhabi, awarding the school \$100,000.00 for students to design and build a working greenhouse for the school. Based on progress and performance to date, the school expects to achieve a graduation rate of at least 79%.
  - Administrators describe common planning "as very important to us". Both department and grade teams meet at least once weekly for hour-long collaboration. As a result, despite two distinct post-readiness pathways, CTE and academic studies teachers work together to identify ways to bridge the differing curricula and to support expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards to further students' learning. For example, the teacher of Electricity now focuses on the language of evidence encouraging students to explain why and how, as they evaluate electrical drawings. The math department has worked closely with CTE teachers to support a student project in designing a mini-golf course. Thus collaborative teacher work supports applied learning opportunities that engage all levels of students. Currently the percentage of students with disabilities on track to graduate within four years is at 59%, almost twice the citywide average.
- Frequent cycles of observation through the lens of the Danielson Framework of Teaching, coupled with focused professional development, promote reflection and goal setting that improve pedagogy. (4.1)

- The school administration has been very transparent in its communication regarding the newly mandated observation system, sharing information, and detailing explicitly the school's professional development plan and teacher requirements in the faculty handbook. Additionally, teachers have been provided opportunities to practice norming practices with fellow teachers by viewing videotaped lessons to agree on scoring. Thus, because of this collaborative training, teachers see the value in being part of a professional learning community and all teachers have selected Option 2 to receive a minimum of six informal observations throughout the year. Published documents clearly stipulate that all teachers, in addition, will receive three-benchmark full period formal observations based on teachers' professional goals around student work, and domains two and three of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Additionally, the school assigns every teacher an Instructional Support Point (ISP) and a supervisor to provide on-going feedback. Content area lead teachers organize teamwork, lead student work review, and organize inter-visitations. Additionally, content lead teachers conduct goal-setting sessions with colleagues during the observation cycle to support growth across the continuum of practice. Supervisors and teachers use observation tracking data astutely to identify exemplary areas of practice and to arrange inter-visitations based on the particular developmental needs of teachers. This data reveals overall teacher growth over time. Supervisory use of Google Docs to record low-inference evidence during observations gives teachers immediate access to detailed data, providing them insight into the effect of their actions and words on student behavior and response, before any post conference meetings. Teachers state that this timely and accurate feedback is helping them to improve their pedagogy. For example, teachers noted that feedback has spurred them to examine the types of questions they employ to check for student understanding, and how they can provide more opportunities for student oral participation in classes.
- Explicit and transparent communication of expectations generates cooperative external partnerships that are well focused on creating conditions for students to meet performance standards. (3.4)
  - The school's clear expectations for school culture define pathways of interactions for life at the school, placing prominence on healthy interpersonal relationships and support of students. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) representative stated that she has "never met two people more transparent with teachers" than the principal and assistant principal. This transparency combined with on-going support such as teams, lead teachers, lesson plan and unit templates, targeted professional development, well-organized study of the school's instructional framework for teaching, online data tracking systems, and goal-setting structures create both trust and a great staff buy-in and establish shared accountability. Teachers explain that team meetings enrich their thinking as they learn about colleagues' work and are motivated through positive peer pressure to find commonalities in supporting student learning. Teachers are responsible for updating grades once a week in "Skedula," the school's online grading tracker. Students, parents, deans, counselors, and administrators, use this online data to monitor progress. Administrators and teachers voice clearly the school's mission to empower their students, to give them a sense of autonomy through a rigorous program of learning and to prepare them as college and trade career ready. As one veteran teacher stated, "The reason I am here..." is because of the "focus on kids."

- Parents emphasize the word “we” continually and significantly when speaking about the school. “We have a big role,” stated a parent when asked if the school made expectations known. Another parent described the excellent communication between parents, teachers, and administrators, as a “winning team,” stating, “I embrace them and they embrace me.” Another parent commented on the “dedication and compassion” of school personnel in “building a relationship with the family.” As a result, both students and parents are articulate in describing the school’s expectations for students’ successful completion of both trade and academic courses of study. A parent related that he and his wife were no longer “the homework police,” as his son now understands what is expected of him. A parent described teachers as making him aware of the importance of listening to his son who did not want to listen to him. Another parent spoke of the school’s practice of having his son review goals monthly to ensure his steady progress. Additionally, students cite some of the ways the school helps them to achieve academic success through after-school programs, teacher volunteerism, online study programs, translators, and step-by step directions. A student succinctly defined the school’s clear expectations remarking that students are expected to graduate, to try their best, come on time, get grades of 85, and learn the “BDCA Ways” of respect, responsibility, and reflection. Another student summed it up by stating, “The school reaches excellence.”

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Improve pedagogy to better align with the school’s framework for teaching to expand opportunities for students to reflect on their thinking and to interact with each other to increase their active engagement in learning. (1.2)
  - The school’s study in mastering the continuum of teaching and student learning within the Danielson Framework for Teaching illuminated the need to develop Domain 3 to increase the level in which students engage with materials and in discussion. Teachers do place emphasis on developing focus questions but, in lessons observed, pacing did not allow sufficient time to re-visit the focus question. While students participate in tasks requiring higher order thinking such as evaluating the accuracy of a floor plan design for electrical installations, interpreting 2-D plans to create 3-D computer representations, or citing textual evidence to agree or disagree with statements about Chinese dynasties, discourse within classes is dominated by teachers. Students presented their work in a reporting format with no elaboration of their thinking while peers listened quietly without response. Although, students interact politely with teachers, dutifully tackling assigned tasks and answering questions, on the whole they are not given opportunities to respond to each other and/or build upon their peers’ contributions. Some teachers, recognizing the need to increase student voice within the classroom, are using strategies such as Socratic seminar and fishbowl discussions. However, teachers still overshadow students by taking the lead in clarification, summarization, and questioning, limiting students’ opportunities to engage in complex substantive reasoning and higher-level discourse, impacting negatively on student participation and thought processing.
- Further intensify assessment analysis in identifying and understanding data trends to strengthen key adjustments school-wide to advance students’ academic outcomes. (2.2)

- The school places great emphasis on serving the individual needs of its students, employing the use of case studies in weekly meetings to assess progress. Recognizing the growth trajectory of students, the school's grading policy increasingly raises the percentage weight of exams and homework as students progress upward in grade levels and gain the skills and aptitude necessary for independent work. Additionally, the school's assessments are calendared out for the full year reflecting assessments aligned to the curricula for both academic and CTE subjects. The school gains actionable feedback from these benchmarks and has adopted the City performance task rubric this year to better understand trends across content areas, as teachers use this data to inform grouping decisions within classroom activities and assign remediation. However, while teachers recognize areas of challenge, the use of performance data is not used in conjunction with analysis of student work products to always determine specific root academic factors that impacts student achievement and require adjustments in pedagogy. Thus, key information is missed in determining and understanding in-depth trends of performance to influence school-wide instructional and curricular adjustments.
- Exit tickets are consistently used to evaluate student understanding across classrooms and students and teachers use data from online programs to track progress, however, opportunities for peer and self-assessment on rubrics are less common practices. Thus, opportunities are missed for students to take fuller ownership in identification of specific next steps to improve their achievement.

### Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Bronx Design and Construction Academy	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	

#### Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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

To what extent does the school ...	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

To what extent does the school ...	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
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