



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Bronx Leadership Academy High School

High School 09X525

**1710 WEBSTER AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10457**

Principal: Kenneth Gaskins, Jr.

**Dates of review: Feb 6-7, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Leadership Academy High School is a high school with 711 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 38% Black, 60% Hispanic, and 1% Other. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 86.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Curricula are aligned to standards and designed to emphasize rigorous habits, which promotes college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - The school has developed an interdisciplinary approach to the English and Global Studies curricula in 9th and 10th grade, carefully connecting selected readings, concepts, instructional practices, projects and common assessments. For example, as students study the causes of revolution in social studies, they read poems by Blake and Hughes to understand the psychological motives, before reading *Persepolis*, incorporating the instructional shifts of conducting close reading and writing using evidence from text. English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities engage in rigorous reading, writing and speaking tasks with books at slightly lower reading levels. For example, beginning and intermediate ELLs, having read *Divergent*, researched historic figures who might serve as leaders for their own “faction” in a chapter they will write themselves, thus building on the book’s organizing structure. The quality of attention to ELLs is corroborated by passing rates on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) of at least 45 percent amongst 9th graders over the last three years. In a self-contained class, students explained how *The Crucible* was an allegory for McCarthyism, indicating that they are accessing the same curricula as their general education peers. Across the school, teachers and students are using tools such as the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) wheel, to design and discuss higher level questions across the curriculum. Teachers are also modifying the College Prep Math program to increase its alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), and crafting tasks that tap into more problem-solving skills. These actions represent a coherent approach to promoting college and career readiness for all students.
- Resources are well aligned to the school’s instructional goals to empower teachers to collaboratively construct opportunities for students to produce meaningful work products. (1.3)
 - The school has aligned resources to enrich student lives as they prepare for college and careers. The school’s instructional goals of ensuring all lessons provide multiple entry points and writing across the curriculum are well supported with investments in technology. These include laptops for each faculty member, nine laptop carts, and SMARTboards in every room, all of which are used by teachers and students daily, and which are maintained by a full-time technician. The school evaluates its efforts to integrate technology into instruction through technology learning walks, and their effectiveness as an instructional resource is evident in the students’ reliance on computers for webquests, online courses, progress monitoring, and for producing final drafts of all substantial papers. With a view toward college preparedness, all students complete an original research paper, ranging from five pages in freshman year to 20 pages in their senior year, some of which are clearly of college-level quality, such as one about the role of Christianity in Tennessee William’s writings. In addition, this year, three freshman classes receive an additional

academic writing course that teachers say has substantially improved the quality of work of incoming students.

- Student and teacher time is organized well, and schedules are re-adjusted mid-year to reflect changing priorities. While an extended school-day accommodates over-enrollment, longer periods during the first semester allow students to complete substantive group projects in class, while shorter periods in the second term afford additional opportunities for students to build skills and content knowledge in areas of need prior to the June Regents. All departments have daily common planning time and teachers of the same course keep to the same pacing calendar and in the case of math, use the same lessons adapted to their particular students. The assistant principal and staff developer support and monitor team progress once a week, while on alternate Fridays, teachers attend cross-department professional development aligned to their own professional goals. New hires must conduct demonstration lessons that are evaluated by teachers and students, a process that resulted in the addition of several first year teachers this year whose lessons demonstrated alignment to the school's academic goals. The thoughtful scheduling of time for structured teacher collaboration results in a strong shared commitment to the provision of challenging learning opportunities for all students, in support of the school's instructional goals to close the achievement gap.
- Diligent assessment practices guide instructional adjustments so that teachers adeptly address identified student needs.(2.2)
 - All teachers use common assessments that are aligned to the curriculum and track progress using electronic tools such as Skedula, which are available to students and their parents, or spreadsheets in GoogleDocs for internal analysis. English teachers use either an adapted Six plus One traits rubric or the NYS Performance Task rubric as appropriate to evaluate student writing, using common periods to norm their grading. This practice allows them to calibrate their understandings of quality, provide precise feedback to students and identify trends and needs. Their analyses impact directly on instruction, as they incorporate that information into planning upcoming units and lessons. For example, there is now a protocol to unpack the task with students so they understand what they are to write about, a graphic showing how analysis is not a summary of content but a bridge between argument and evidence, and a technique to introduce counterargument. Similarly, biweekly common assessments are given in math and science. The common assessments, shared understandings of quality work and clear grading policies ensure that classroom grades are an accurate reflection of student mastery. Thus, scholarship reports are used reliably to inform supervisors' discussions with teachers and teacher teams about the connection between student outcomes and teacher practice.
 - Across classrooms, teachers conduct a variety of informal assessments, most typically, checking in on groups of students and individual students as they work through classroom tasks, cold calling in math classrooms that also keeps students alert and attuned, and exit tickets. When group tasks are designed to have each student contribute a portion, teachers ascertain that students are working at the appropriate level of challenge,

adjusting on the spot as needed, and then take that knowledge to adjust the task in the next class. For example, in a Global Studies comparative religions assignment, the sixth step involved a synthesis, so in the next class period, that step was assigned to the group as a whole. In addition to screening data from computer adaptive assessments, these ongoing assessments also inform the tiering of students who are then provided with additional in-class supports and tutoring. These practices result in teachers' ability to adapt instruction to meet all students' learning needs.

- School leaders have established a culture for learning that communicates and supports high expectations to staff and students, leading to persistence and a drive towards continual reflection and improvement. (3.4)
 - The school's high standards for quality instruction are currently aligned explicitly to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, which had existed as one of several tools for unifying staff around common criteria for professional conduct in the past. This year's professional development has focused on deepening teacher understanding of the framework, resulting in greater teacher confidence and capacity without jeopardizing the strong sense of trust amongst all constituents, as evidenced by the prior years' practice of collectively analyzing videotapes of all teachers. Cycles of observation and the teachers' own reflective processes ensure that teachers are held accountable for the expectations. Newer teachers are acculturated through one-on-one support in areas such as communicating with parents to ensure that their actions align well with school norms.
 - The success of the school's graduates is a source of pride and reflects the institution's dedication to promoting college and career readiness. On Alumni day, inspiring graduates return to the school to speak with each class, advising them on the habits they acquired at the school that ensured their later success. Each cohort has its own guidance counselor who meets regularly with the cohort and with individual students twice a year to review transcripts, identify candidates for the honors and other advanced classes in the upper grades, and stage the college preparation process, while all seniors dedicate the first few weeks of school to crafting their application essays. The success of the school's efforts to build perseverance to ensure college and career readiness are evidenced by a six year weighted diploma rate that is at the top of the school's peer group and high ratings on associated metrics of the NYC Progress Report.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure consistency in the use of pedagogical practices that promote effective student-centered collaboration so that students continually engage in high levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, the school's beliefs in promoting the teacher as a facilitator of learning, and of providing all students with frequent opportunities to read, write, speak and listen to high school-level content aligned to standards was evident. Teachers provide multiply entry points into the curriculum through the use of visuals, technology, and physical

models, and provide supports such as graphic organizers and rubrics to support student independence as they undertake tasks in pairs, small groups or individually. Some important texts are read aloud to ensure struggling readers, including those with disabilities, can participate in meaningful discussions. Some teachers excel in questioning, such as in an 11th grade English class, where the teacher prompted one group to rephrase their answer as an overarching idea and another group to build on their hypothesis that the writer's own hospitalization would influence the conflict. However, there was some variation in the degree to which teachers were able to fully implement their intended practices. For example, in one class, the teacher summarized the materials before students had time to think for themselves, thus foreclosing an opportunity for them to build understanding together, and in another, the teacher asked "right there" questions and concluded without a summary. These inconsistencies in instructional practices limit students from participating at the highest level possible for academic achievement.

- Sharpen feedback to teachers by consistently specifying next steps that connect teacher practice to student outcomes to accelerate improvements in the practice of all teachers. (4.1)
 - School leaders support the development of all teachers through the provision of school-wide professional development, as well as individual and collaborative supports, all of which are guided by school goals and the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders are also able to articulate each teacher's strengths and areas for improvement, and teachers are well-disposed to incorporating the feedback into their practice. For example, in the class of a 2nd year teacher whose feedback in October indicated a need to plan more open-ended questions to stimulate and sustain student dialogue, the students now animatedly discussed several contemporary videotaped interviews about abuse to predict how the theme might develop in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Some grade teams have also exchanged classes for a week to enable them to get insights from their colleagues about how to better teach their students. The administration states that for several years, teachers have engaged in learning walks to help build a common understanding of quality teaching which is now reinforced through the cycles of observation and the individual goal-setting conferences. Teachers state that the feedback they get is very thorough and includes an action plan, follow up support and monitoring by an assistant principal or staff developer. However, supervisors are not yet fully calibrated in their evaluations of teaching, resulting in some very highly rated teachers receiving no next steps, an outcome that is sometimes at odds with the slightly lower levels of student work being produced. As a result, there are some missed opportunities to guide all teachers to the highest levels of performance.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: School name: Bronx Leadership Academy High School	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