

Quality Review Report

2013-2014

Bronx Arena High School

08X537

**1440 STORY AVENUE
BRONX NY, 10473**

Principal: Ty Cesene

**Dates of Review: Oct 22-23, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Carron Staple**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Arena High School is a transfer school with 200 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 43% Black, 55% Hispanic, and 2% White. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 1% 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 69.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has designed a comprehensive mastery-based blended learning curriculum that is well aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, (CCLS) and promotes college and career readiness for all students, (1.1)
 - The school is part of the Mastery Based Learning Pilot, an asynchronous program sponsored by the Department of Education's Division of Innovation that supports schools in awarding credit to students based on mastery rather than the traditional seat time. The school is required to have curriculum maps and lesson plans for each unit to demonstrate the alignment between standards and assessments, provide copies of each assessment, including samples of student work, and use a database to track learning targets. The principal and the curriculum team's integration of the instructional shifts into the blended learning experiences ensures that students are recipients of curricula that is aligned to CCLS where they accumulate credit quickly and advance to the next course. All students, including English language learners (ELL's) and students with disabilities (SWD's), receive a mastery-based, blended instructional model provided by a content specialist and a generalist teacher, resulting in personalization of courses, including differentiation of presentation, process and student product. This is resulting in students being able to demonstrate habits of learning that include questioning of their peers and teachers, listening with understanding to engage in accountable talk, applying knowledge to demonstrate mastery, persistence in dealing with academic challenges, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills that promote college and career readiness. Teachers examine student work products on a weekly basis to refine curricula, tasks, assessments, and lesson plans, to ensure that students are being cognitively engaged on a consistent basis. The curriculum team includes students to ensure they can access the curricula and demonstrate their understanding. The students help to evaluate the effectiveness of the tasks and challenges and discuss real world applications by explaining to the curriculum team where they struggled and succeeded, how their understanding of the tasks help them with real world situations, and how rubrics help them with organizing their thoughts and writing. The impact of this collaboration has resulted in more students engaged in evidence-based writing, as well as their ability to complete the challenges that positively affect their progress.
- The principal and his co-partners make strategic organizational decisions that are aligned to the school's instructional goals resulting in improved teacher practices and learning outcomes for students. (1.3)
 - The school was entirely restructured this year to establish eight classrooms referred to as arenas. Twenty-five or less students remain in their assigned arena for a four hour block each day, and receive core instruction from a content-specialist teacher with the support of a generalist teacher and an advocate counselor who serve as partners in the room on a daily basis. The additional 90 minutes of the day are spent taking classes that include physical education, the arts, advisory, Regents prep, and electives. Bronx Arena's partnership with SCO Family of Services provides students with advocate counselors who help meet students' social-emotional and academic needs so they can focus on their learning and go onto college and careers as evidenced by their 100% college retention rate. The principal has also used resources to hire Eskolta and ReDesign consultants who help administrators and teachers examine school systems, data and instructional practices to help accomplish goals toward increasing credit accumulation and improving the Regents and graduation rate. To ensure that the blended

curriculum will result in improved instruction and meaningful student work products, an investment was made in purchasing MacBook Pro laptop computers, iPads, and Apple TV's, enabling students ability to work on tasks 24 hours a day if they choose, and teachers are able to monitor and track performance and mastery of CCLS-aligned competencies using the school's online tracking tool. This tracking tool has led to increased credit accumulation, increased Regents passing rate, and increased student autonomy and ownership of work. A strategic decision was made to create a schedule where teams of teachers could meet daily and weekly to meet and receive professional development. This schedule allows teachers to share best practices, discuss student work and outcomes, review and design curriculum, lesson and facilitation plans resulting in individualized action plans for students.

- The collaborative hiring process includes administrators, teachers and students, who designed a hiring rubric that includes candidates answering questions aligned to the school's mission, vision, and core values. Candidates are expected to show understanding of the unique transfer school population that is overage and under-credited and demonstrate instructional strengths during a demo lesson to ensure that all adults who intend to support students are flexible and willing to provide varying modes of instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Furthermore, teacher-to-student ratios are lower this year (25: 2), as compared to last year, (34:1) to support the personalization of instruction and support the varying needs of students. ELLs and SWDs are grouped and integrated within arenas and all teachers and counselors are aware of student's individual academic needs, which they plan for when designing curriculum, unit plans and daily lessons.
- The caring and cohesive school community uses a strengths-based approach to culture-building that results in a safe and productive learning environment that promotes students' social-emotional and academic growth. (1.4)
 - The school's well-structured learning environment includes support from advocate counselors, who conduct daily individual and group counseling to target social/interpersonal processes in order to foster classroom learning. Moreover, regularly scheduled case conferencing is conducted where each student's progress is cyclically reviewed. In addition, counselors also conduct daily attendance outreach and both parents and students spoke of regular occurrences of home visits after a student missed two days of school. In the classroom the advocate counselor known as the AC, serves as co-facilitator in learning and is available to support students who may face ambiguity and frustration in their learning process. The counselor meets regularly with arena teachers to discuss classroom dynamics, environment, individual progress and how they can support students reaching their goals. The internship coordinator and career counselor also work with the students to ensure their learning-to-work experiences are meaningful and relevant to their personal goals and aspirations post-high school. Every student is known by multiple adults, and there are community based partners that work with the school to support students' individual needs and lifestyle. These include Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, which provides free confidential medical, dental, vision and mental health services, Bronx Nurse Family Partnership provides pre- and post-natal care for the seven expectant mothers and their infants through age two, and the Bronx Fatherhood Initiative provides information and supports young fathers as they encourage participation with their children. Access Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), formerly known as Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) provides career and continuing education for adults with special needs. College related supports and services include: City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), College Now, Options Institute, Bronx and Manhattan Educational Opportunities Centers, and New York (NY) Cares, an organization that provides financial aid workshops for students and their

families as they deal with the cost of paying for college. Academic related supports include the I-Zone for which the school has received Ambassador status on a national and international level. Additionally, the school is a member of the Transfer School Common Core Institute (TSCCI) and is supported by a host of consultants who help to monitor student outcomes and work in each course and track incremental learning through competencies that are tied to challenges and tasks across all disciplines. With a demographic population where 94% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, have family care-taking responsibilities, are parents, are pregnant, are in transitional housing and in foster care, it is evident that the school strategically aligns outreach to address these situations to ensure that students can engage in learning and achieve personal and academic success. The students spoke of Bronx Arena being a second family where they feel safe and respected by all adults, and discussed candidly how very appreciative they were of this unique second opportunity to learn in an environment where people care about them as individuals.

- Across every arena classroom, assessment practices are explicitly aligned to key competencies resulting in an effective analysis of student progress that leads to instructional adjustments that promote and increase proficiency and mastery. (2.2)
 - Students at Bronx Arena are provided with continuous and meaningful feedback on all assignments. Every summative assessment uses a detailed rubric to provide students with targeted feedback, which is an important component of the mastery-based program utilized by the school. Standardized grading policies and the use of school-wide rubrics ensure that students are evaluated at a consistent level. Teachers collaborate with each other on designing curriculum-aligned assessments and rubrics, while conferencing with students on a daily basis, to provide next steps for improving the quality of their work and ways to revise it, resulting in improved student achievement and mastery of courses. Courses are designed by the Curriculum Design Team, comprised of teachers from a variety of disciplines, including those who teach SWDs and ELLs to ensure that curricula design is collaborative and includes assessments for all learners. Additionally students from a variety of skill levels are also included on this team and are involved in creating and revising curriculum and assessments, which ensures that student voice is present to help craft a clear picture of what mastery looks like so all learner needs are being met. The digital tracker shows overall class data, as well as evidence in real time of teachers checking for understanding, providing feedback to students, tracking their progress and monitoring their next steps. The students use the daily tracker to monitor their progress and as a result are able to revise their goals and make adjustments based on daily teacher feedback, peer and self-assessment.
- School leaders effectively use various observation and reflection structures coupled with targeted supports for development to promote professional growth and elevate instructional practices. (4.1)
 - School leaders and teacher peers conduct regular classroom observations taking low-inference notes and providing feedback that is aligned to the Danielson framework. First and second year teachers are given mentors who they meet with regularly to discuss planning and preparation, best practices and student outcomes. Additionally, inter-visitations are conducted among the entire staff and time is provided for teachers to give feedback to each other. During weekly professional development student work and data is examined and teachers learn new strategies for teaching, allowing a broader array of practices that support increased student achievement. As evidenced by the principal's post-observation tracker, teachers receive precise feedback that captures strengths and areas for improvement as aligned to Danielson's domains 2 and 3 which include classroom environment and instruction. Teachers have verbal discussions

with school leaders and receive next steps in writing as to how to improve their practice to align their professional goals of improving pedagogy with school-wide goals. Professional development is planned with the teachers' and school's goals in mind as well as individualized teacher needs. During the summer, intensive work was done to improve the instructional design using a strengths-based/partnership model where the content area and generalist teacher work together to design instruction. Workshops on blended learning PD was conducted, and teachers role-played being students and the model they would be asking students to engage with to get a better understanding of where their instruction needed to improve. The school also tweaked and re-designed the challenges students' need to complete a course to ensure that their understanding of transfer of knowledge was being met. Furthermore, there is also a multitude of teacher leaders who work diligently to improve the work of their peers on inquiry and content teams. Teacher growth is documented and tracked over time and reflects teachers implementing their learning from professional development and how it impacts student learning as evidenced by student work products, assessments and completion of tasks. Most teachers have chosen Option 2 (6 informal observations) as their preferred method for being observed, and have normed with the understanding that their growth will be evidenced in increased student outcomes resulting in more students completing courses, passing Regents and graduating.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to strengthen teacher capacity so that rigorous tasks, culminating capstone projects, and the questioning that leads to students understanding, appropriately challenges all learners to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills. (1.2)
 - At Bronx Arena classrooms are referred to as arenas where students benefit from two or more teachers to support and facilitate their instruction in four-hour blocks of time, because students work on multiple courses at one time. Across arenas, teaching practices are informed by the research-based Danielson framework, to ensure that every student, including ELLs and SWDs are engaged in rigorous work that is multi-tiered, scaffolded, and appropriately challenging. Every arena teacher writes lesson plans that incorporate learning targets, literacy strategies, and assessments for learning. Furthermore, laptop computers are utilized by all students, where they respond to their daily instructional challenges and tasks with the support of a content and generalist teacher. Moreover, common teaching strategies include direct instruction, turn and talk, flexible grouping, one-to-one teacher to student individualized instruction, peer revision and support, and self-assessment using rubrics. As a result, demonstration of higher-order thinking in most student discussions and student work products allows students to work at their pace and advances them to the next level of performance to ultimately complete culminating capstone projects that demonstrate mastery. However, in one arena, where efforts were made by a generalist teacher to involve a specific student who worked independently, this student appeared less engaged and did not have her thinking pushed to the same extent that the smaller groups did with the content teacher because the questioning resulted in one word answers that did not require higher-level thinking or optimal participation. Although daily instruction is facilitated by a variety of teachers, in multiple modes to meet the individualized needs of each student, in this instance it did not align to provide targeted support that leads to improved student achievement and proficiency.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

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|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----|
| School name: Bronx Arena 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 | |