



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bard High School Early College Queens

High School Q299

**30-20 Thomson Avenue
Queens
NY 11101**

Principal: Valeri Thomson

**Date of review: April 22, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sheila S.-Gorski**

The School Context

Bard High School Early College Queens is a high school with 600 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 11% Black, 17% Hispanic, 35% White, and 35% Asian students. The student body includes 2% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 98.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Well Developed
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The principal consistently communicates high expectations and provides training for staff who work together with administrators and share elevated levels of expectations. The school community tactically provides clear, effective feedback and guidance/advisement supports to all students.

Impact

The school's established culture for learning and its collective structures to systematically communicate its high expectations results in reciprocal accountability between all constituents for student success, preparing them for their next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders use the Danielson Framework to benchmark feedback to faculty and have involved them in incorporating an agreed upon process. The school emphasizes its faculty's scholarly level of expertise reflecting degrees from Harvard University, New York University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University as a vehicle to ensuring that students benefit from academic role models and instruction that enable them to meet the criteria for the next level of their education. Students engage in a rigorous curriculum in all subject areas, including the arts and physical education, completing 60 college credits and receiving an Associate degree from Bard College.
- Inter-peer observations include a feedback letter from colleagues that is used as a formative assessment to improve classroom practices such as designing rubrics that purposefully align to curricula to measure writing expectations that include argument, evidence, structure, and mechanics.
- The principal's high expectations for student engagement are noted in effective work habits, and student responsibility, which the school states has, "always been a hallmark of Bard High School Early College". Course syllabi explicitly detail expectations and are posted online so that students have ready access.
- The principal's high expectations for students include learning Latin. Students enrolled in the course have taken the National Latin Exam from the University of Mary Washington, receiving accolades for high scores. One Bard student achieved a perfect score. Of over 140,000 students participating in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Guam, England, Italy, Poland, and 13 other countries, only 1,833 achieved this distinction. The student received a special certificate in recognition of this outstanding achievement.
- Academic advisors work with approximately 18 students each, engaging them in a weeklong "writing and thinking" workshop driven by the school's curricula. This helps all new students acclimate to their new school community and to the teacher who will also be their advisor for the duration of their academic career at the school. Additionally, this long-term relationship cultivates a true partnership between the school and families in supporting students. The school's emphasizes two clear foci: students prepared for college work by the end of grade 10 and student graduates with 60 college credits and readiness for the challenges of further college learning. The school's most recent School Guide cites 99% of students graduating in 2013-2014 as college and career ready.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

The vast majority of teachers use common assessments, student self-assessment, and checks for understanding to track progress, gain a clear picture of student achievement, and inform effective adjustments.

Impact

Meaningful feedback regarding student performance drives curricular and instructional adjustments enabling all students to achieve increased academic mastery. The school continues to enhance its assessment practices to build upon its repertoire and afford students ample opportunities to know their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's data specialist, also the systems analyst, evaluates academic performance and trends, and shares this data with the academic goals and assessment committee, which establishes and revises goals. An extensive annual data report on reaching goals and recommendations for curricular shifts is shared during weekly department meetings. The algebra and geometry team administer approximately four exams each year measuring math skills on a scale of 0 through 4 with corresponding letter grades. Students can re-do work to improve their grade on the standards assessed. The school continues to work on ensuring that students understand various modes of reaching their next level of learning.
- All teachers write narratives for each of their students regarding student academic progress across the content areas four times per year. Narratives are used strategically to provide context around the student's status and to capture the student as a learner in a series of steps. This analysis is used to target interventions for students in need of support and to revise goals to further support all students. Students engage in a free-write as they reflect on their teachers' comments and on that same writing piece respond to a series of questions, one of which asks, "Do you know how to improve?" Students are charged with being resourceful and taking responsibility for self-assessing. The latter part of this process is to engage students in narrative report conferences. Explanations of grades are also included citing rubric-based performance levels and numerical scores, scales ratings from excellent to unsatisfactory, and mastery-based levels.
- All content area departments implement the use of student work portfolios assessing dialogue writing, small group critiques, and writer's questions. They also meet intermittently to discuss student work and their status. Currently, the staff is studying professional books on assessment; examining techniques and evaluating strategies, to further enhance the school's practices and students' independent assessment skills and ownership in their work.
- Teachers incorporate indicators in their plans as checkpoints to assess students' comprehension and to support students in monitoring their own progress throughout a course. Two particular examples include the reading log journals that students use in humanities classes and standards-based evaluations in math. The reading log is a tool used to prompt critical thinking, requiring students to develop an active interpretation and analysis for every primary source they have read. The Social Studies department, for example, describes the log as a way to encourage students to "interrogate" a text, developing their understanding and bringing that understanding to class.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order thinking are embedded in tasks in a coherent way across subjects and content areas.

Impact

Coherence across grades and subjects promotes all students' demonstration of critical and analytical thinking that prepares them for future academic endeavors, college, and careers.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade 9 and 10 students are afforded two years of college preparatory high school curriculum. During their last two years, students experience an early college program in lieu of grades 11 and 12. Students engage in college courses and intellectual challenges comparable to those offered at leading colleges across the country. The partnership between the school and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) affords the school this provision at no cost. The school implements the Institute for Writing and Thinking Workshop as its main curricula adapted from text developed at Bard College of Simon's Rock. This strategic decision is based on the school's commitment to provide opportunities for students to practice writing as a means of developing, exploring, and expanding their thoughts in real-life situations to prepare students for higher education.
- The school engaged in a crosswalk to align the school's units and academic tasks to the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, dialogue writing includes narratives that students are required to write developing real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequence. A particular writing, focus free writing, requires students to engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and creating one or multiple points of views. A lesson plan included a task that required students to engage in a focus-free write on a quote from Confucius, "The strength of a nation depends on the strength of the home," sharing their thinking and perspective in agreement or disagreement, connecting the sentiment of the quote to the internal and external, as well as domestic and international state of America in the 1890's and today. Other units and tasks reviewed show similar requirements in all content areas. Specifically, all units include response journals, small group critique, process writing, and process notes.
- All lesson plans reviewed included a text selection(s) and objectives, and a component called "clarity" which ensures that instructions, prompts and timing are planned. Further, teachers use a technique called "streamlining" to evaluate lessons in terms of numbers of prompts, pacing and connections to homework and prior class work. Each lesson plan contains challenging questions to facilitate student discussions. To comprehend lessons better, students use the reading journal from the prior day or use process prompts to reflect on the point of the lesson. An English literature first year seminar lesson requires students to read from Cantos 28 and 29 of Dante's Inferno and lead discussions and pose exploring passages that resonate with them.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Pedagogical practices in the vast majority of classrooms exhibit strategic high quality instructional supports including questioning and discussion and extensions into the curricula. Student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation by all students.

Impact

All learners engage in challenging activities that promote higher order thinking and work that is demonstrative of rigor, student cognition, and ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are given multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding of their learning in challenging tasks through writing, discussion, and hands-on work. Students in a Literature of the Americas class participated in a Socratic seminar regarding the book *Catcher in the Rye*, inferring and discussing metaphorical language referring to the character of Holden being way up high on top of Thomsen Hill. Student responses included, "Holden has an inferiority complex, being up on a hill makes him feel higher," and "The literal heights make him feel above others."
- Students were observed recording passages from texts and working on math problems, while jotting down comments and sharing their reasoning for choosing a particular passage or for solving a problem in a particular way. The majority of student voices had agency as students challenged each other expressing their perceptions in classes. For example, in an English literature seminar class, students reading *Dante's Inferno* expressed thoughts from a canto stating, "Dante was stating that others should learn from his life and not fall into the same sins he has, symbolic of avoiding the hell that he has endured!" and "When Dante seems to be moving slowly, Virgil seems to have lost his patience with him, a true human characteristic."
- During a chemistry class that required students to create the structural isomers of pentane, students articulated their thinking with peers while using molecular model kits to create different isomer structures describing chain and position isomers and stereoisomers, and the resonance structures of the nitrate ion and their characteristics. Student volunteers drew their isomers and received feedback from numerous numbers of peers who explained their thinking as they gave detailed feedback.
- During a math class on exponential functions and models student pairs worked at the board showing and explaining their thinking while the class listened and interacted with them. Further discussion ensued by students at the board, peers, and the teacher and an ongoing think aloud was heard throughout the lesson. Students confidently explained their approach to solving the problems and the teacher enthusiastically complimented the students exclaiming, "Technically, you are correct. I'm not going to change your thinking at all!"

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers engage in meaningful inquiry work systematically analyzing teacher practice and strategically deepening their understanding of instructional practices and strengthening distributed leadership roles.

Impact

Very effective inquiry work strengthens distributive leadership roles that support teachers' integral role in key school decisions that strengthen ongoing teacher growth, instructional coherence, and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The Department Liaison committee includes members representing all departments and meets on a weekly basis for the purpose of discussing key potential academic decisions. The team uses student data to inform instructional practices and adjustments they share via a drop box. For example, the grade 9 team made the decision to use standards-based grading and share assessment strategies and discussion questions across the disciplines in the humanities, largely due to the fact that the school's curricula across all subjects and content areas is based on writing and thinking.
- Inquiry teams include the Academic and Goals team and the Student Support team, which focus their work on the implementation of several instructional shifts. For example, the science team has added workshops on citations for all ninth grade students to ensure that the students' thinking in argumentative writing reflects use of text-based evidence. Additionally, the team has incorporated the use of Excel to help students understand graphing. To accelerate ninth and tenth grade students comprehension, teams develop vocabulary lessons generated from word lists of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and words students come across in their texts. Additionally, each semester the school uses course evaluations, modeled after those used at Bard College to collect student feedback on courses, including all students in the decisions that affect the learning made across the school. In the school's last School Quality Snapshot, the average SAT score was 1822.
- The school has an embedded structure of governance via the Department Liaison Committee where faculty and the administration teams engage in ongoing discussions regarding policy at the school and making key decisions building consensus with contributions from all departments. For example, based on student data analysis, this year the math team has established "math recitation sections" to support students who are struggling in their math classes. These sections are offered during the school day to support classwork and to provide opportunities for small group work.
- During a teacher team meeting teachers articulated their goal, "to ultimately ensure that all students use critical thinking across all disciplines." To achieve this they highlighted the rigor embedded in their school's curricula, Institute for Writing and Thinking Workshop, which all students experience across all subjects and content areas. The team stated that they strengthen their professional knowledge via the opportunities to engage their students in inquiry and critical thinking promoted across all subject areas.