



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

West Bronx Academy for the Future

Middle-High School X243

**500 East Fordham Road
Bronx
NY 10458**

Principal: Wilper Morales

**Date of review: May 13, 2015
Reviewer: Mimi Fortunato**

The School Context

West Bronx Academy for the Future is a middle - high school with 542 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 21% Black, 73% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89.0%.

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	Developing
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	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Developing
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	Proficient
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The principal consistently communicates high expectations regarding professionalism, instruction, communication, and other elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching to the entire staff, provides training. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness to families.

Impact

Structures for communication and a system of accountability promote a culture of high expectations for staff. Reciprocal communication with families helps families understand student progress towards expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create individualized professional development plans, and reflect on their progress towards established goals. Frequent cycles of observation and feedback to teachers provide ongoing feedback to teachers regarding progress towards professional goals. A review of observation reports demonstrates that teachers are provided with time bound feedback, promoting a culture of accountability for progress towards established expectations. For example, a teacher observation report stated, “Visit the link to ARIS Learn activity #762: Crafting text Dependent Questions: Enhanced Discussion and Assessment of Learning. Please begin to implement the recommendation immediately, to be fully implemented by March 31, 2015.”
- Professional development is provided to teachers to support them in meeting the school’s expectations for professional growth. For example, teachers participate in off-site professional development opportunities such as the New Visions Accessing Algebra Through Inquiry (a2i) math program workshops, and the New Visions Global Studies pilot program. The middle school math teachers are also participating in a grant-funded inter-school professional development series. Teachers participate in class intervisitations, and have developed an intervisitation protocol to ensure that teachers gather low inference data to share feedback with colleagues. Prior to each visit, teachers determine a focus for the visit, selecting from a menu of topics aligned to the school’s instructional foci and goals, such as workshop model implementation, technology integration, and differentiated instruction.
- Parents shared that they are in contact with teachers regarding their child’s progress through emails, phone calls, and monthly calendars. Parents stated that they are provided with support in understanding the school’s expectations for their children through opportunities such as parent conferences where parents meet with teachers and the guidance counselor and receive information regarding preparation for the college search and application process. The school has implemented the Datacation Pupil Path online grading system that provides parents with on-demand access to real-time data regarding student participation and performance. Parents shared that they access this system and the Class Do Jo online behavior tracking system on a regular basis, and many parents stated that they appreciate the timeliness of the information on their child’s progress.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies, including questioning, scaffolds in English, inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, and student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Inconsistent teaching strategies lead to uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher order thinking skills in class discussions and student work products, including the work of English language learners and student with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Lessons across the majority of classes did not consistently provide evidence of the use of scaffolds and multiple entry points to engage all learners. For example, while in a social studies class for students with disabilities, the lesson plan stated that, “Students will be grouped according to compatibility and ability”, and that “Students who need a computer will have access to one”; however, targeted research-based instructional supports for the diverse learners in the class were not observed. In other classes observed, students were paired or grouped during independent or group practice. However, students were not able to articulate the rationale for the seating, and in most classes, all students were assigned an identical task.
- The school has identified promoting the use of high level questioning as an instructional focus, and some teachers’ lesson plans noted Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions that would be posed by the teacher to the class. However, teachers’ use of questioning and discussion techniques varied across classrooms. For example, in an English class lesson on *Oedipus the King*, the teacher posed high level multi-layered questions such as, “According to Oepidus, what can Teiresias see? What can’t he see? How does this shape your understanding of what it means to be a “seer”?” In this class, the teacher posed the questions to the students through the use of Google Docs, with students responding at their own pace and the teacher asking follow-up questions via the Google Docs online software. However, in an English as a Second Language class, the teacher posed numerous low-level questions to the class, including, “If you write notes for yourself, who is the audience?”, and the teacher directed students to turn and talk and respond in writing to similar low-level questions posted on the board. Furthermore, the bell rang less than two minutes after these questions were posted, so that students did not have an opportunity to read or discuss the questions posed.
- The principal has identified trends in teacher practice and developed a plan of action to deepen teacher skill in providing students with opportunities to engage in high-level discussion. This focus was apparent in some classes. For example, in a grade 8 English language arts class on the novel, *Monster*, students were engaged in partner and group talk as they participated in a gallery walk in which they reviewed textual evidence citing character traits that supported the characterization of key characters in the novel. However, although there were opportunities for peer-to-peer discussion in some classes, whole group discussions were generally teacher dominated as teachers asked questions of individual students. In full class discussions in most classes observed, the pattern-of-teacher to student interaction was call and response, limiting student engagement and ownership of the discourse.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Curricula do not provide evidence of consistent planning and refinement of academic tasks to meet the needs of the school's diverse learners.

Impact

As a result of inconsistent integration of the instructional shifts and uneven refinement in curricular planning, access to the curricula and cognitive engagement is hindered for some learners, including English Language learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The instructional team is in the process of adapting curricula across all content areas that is aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and incorporates the instructional shifts. For example, the middle school math teachers have adapted the Connected Math program (CMP 3), and have incorporated some tasks from EngageNY. Most lesson plans across content areas provide evidence of planning for alignment to Common Core Learning Standards. However, planning is inconsistent in incorporating the instructional shifts. For example, in a grade 8 math lesson on the Pythagorean Theorem, the plan called for students to apply the Pythagorean Theorem to real world situations. In this lesson plan, the teacher noted that students would work cooperatively to generate solutions to the problems, use mathematical reasoning, and justify their thinking. However, in a grade 6/7 social studies class lesson plan for special education students on the geography of India, the task noted in the lesson plan called for students to select a geographical location in India and to complete a worksheet that depicted a real estate ad using crayons. This lesson plan did not include planning for opportunities for students to build a deeper understanding of the geography of India, access non-fiction text, cite textual evidence, or to justify their thinking.
- The principal stated that he expects teachers to plan for strategic grouping to deepen student participation. Some lesson plans reviewed provided evidence of planning for students to work in groups. However, it is not clear how tasks are planned and refined using student work and data as most lesson plans did not clearly indicate how these groupings would support individual student needs or how the English language learners and students with disabilities would have access to the tasks.
- Some lesson plans noted strategies, such as providing students with scaffolded vocabulary or tiered tasks. However, multiple entry points, scaffolds, or differentiation were not noted in other lesson plans. In cases where strategies were noted, these were not consistently specific to individual student needs. For example, a grade 8 math lesson plan noted that students would be provided with tiered tasks designed to support entry to the high level content for students at different skill levels. However, a grade 7 science lesson plan on visible light and other electromagnetic waves noted that all students would complete the same brain starter and read the same text. A grade 7 social studies lesson plan did not indicate how students might access the task of describing the life of a soldier during the Civil War, and the lesson plan indicated that all students were to be assigned the same brain starter, class work, and exit slip.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school’s curricula. Teachers’ assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Inconsistent assessment systems and structures limit effective feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Uneven use of checks for understanding and student self-assessment hinders the development of effective instructional adjustments to meet student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have content-specific grading policies that incorporate summative and formative assessment elements. However, as the formula varies from course to course and each grading policy contains a number of redundant elements, the information provided to teachers and students does not always provide a clear assessment of mastery of learning standards. For example, most grading policies contain a percentage for classwork or student participation. However, it was not clear how teachers develop grades for classwork in each lesson. Teachers used varied methods for assessing and noting the grade for classwork. While one teacher was observed using the online ClassDoJo system for grading behaviors of students during class, other teachers were not observed noting a grade for student participation or classwork. Across classrooms, students could not articulate how their classwork or participation grade was calculated. A high school student indicated that he believed that his classwork grade for the day would be 100% because he was good. Another high school student in a math class stated that she was not aware that classwork or participation grades were part of the course grade, despite the high school’s math department’s stated grading policy components of classwork (15%), participation (10%), homework (15%), quizzes (15%), and exams (45%).
- The instructional team is engaged in the ongoing process of refining rubrics, and some teachers use task-specific rubrics to share next learning steps. Some teacher feedback on student work is aligned to a task-specific rubric. For example, a student’s English essay posted on a hall bulletin board was attached to a task-specific rubric and contained teacher feedback. However, although the student’s grade was 78%, the teacher feedback did not identify next learning steps. In some instances, teacher feedback was not fully aligned to the task rubric, and some feedback was limited to comments such as, “Great job!”, or “Excellent work”. On social studies work, feedback consisted of checks, Xs, and a numerical grade. In addition, while a grade 8 math teacher was observed providing students with opportunities to self-assess during class, this was not observed in most classes visited. Teachers shared that across classrooms, the assessment process does not yet consistently incorporate student reflection and self-assessment.
- The principal shared that teachers are expected to use varied strategies to check for understanding during lessons, such as questioning, conferencing, and exit slips. However, across classrooms, checks for understanding and instructional adjustments were inconsistent. For example, an English teacher was observed conferencing with small groups of students, clarifying the task, and addressing misconceptions. However, an English as a Second Language teacher asked the class, “Do we agree?”, and did not wait for students’ responses.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers engage in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributive leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Teacher collaboration promotes the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards, alignment of practice to the school's instructional goals, and strengthens teacher capacity. Teachers have opportunities to build leadership capacity, and have a voice in key decisions regarding student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher team agendas and minutes indicate that teachers consistently engage in an inquiry approach that has strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers. For example, a social studies teacher shared that the New Visions Global Studies pilot program and teacher team work has strengthened his understanding of how to engage students more deeply in argumentative writing and citing textual evidence. ADVANCE data demonstrates that the ratings of teacher practice in the Danielson Framework for Teaching component of instruction increased 13%, with 77% of teachers rated effective in January 2015 as compared to 64% rated effective in September, 2014.
- Teachers engage in structured inquiry protocols while analyzing tasks and student work. For example, the middle school math inquiry team was observed using a protocol in analyzing a teacher-developed grade 8 math task, assessing the task using a rubric, and providing feedback to the teacher who developed the task. Members of this team were able to clearly articulate the outcomes of their work on shared teacher practice.
- Teachers stated that they have a voice in key instructional decisions, and affirmed that their perceptions and findings are taken into consideration. For example, teacher leaders facilitate content and grade level meetings, and teachers assume a leadership role in supporting colleagues. Teachers shared that the professional development team provides feedback to the principal on professional development planning, and teachers assume responsibility for facilitating professional development for colleagues. A review of the professional development calendar indicated that teachers facilitate professional development on topics, such as curricula planning, the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, technology, and the Positive Behavior Intervention System that the school has begun to implement. High school teachers analyzed the scholarship data for grade 9 students and determined the need to provide some students with additional opportunities to demonstrate mastery and gain course credits. The team initiated a credit recovery program to support students in attaining course credit. As a result of this initiative, the grade 9 pass rate increased from 78.26% to 79.35%. Teachers and the assistant principal initiated the advisory implementation based on the results of the Learning Environment Survey, as well as identified student need, and teachers developed a reflection survey that students completed after the first term. Teachers then made adjustments to the advisory program based on student reflections.