

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bronx Lab School

High School X265

**800 East Gun Hill Road
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Sarah Marcy

**Date of review: March 2, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sabrina Cook**

The School Context

Bronx Lab School is a high school with 471 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 40% Black, 55% Hispanic, 1% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 81.8%.

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	Celebration	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Curricula across grades and subjects is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrates the instructional shifts. Teachers refine it using student work and data.

Impact

Plans at the teacher and school-wide level are refined to promote college and career readiness and ensure a diversity of learners including English language learners and students with disabilities have access to engaging and rigorous academic tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- To ensure the curricula emphasizes rigorous habits and higher-order skills that promote college and career readiness, the school aligns curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and New York Performance Standards Consortium rubrics. Planning of tasks focuses on evidenced based writing, inquiry, and discussion. This focus has caused a shift in team planning of curricula. For example, to increase the rigor in history classes, the social studies team has shifted towards a thematic approach. Additionally the practice of teaching history from an historian's viewpoint is being used to embed an inquiry approach and better align to Consortium standards.
- The school focuses on the Bronx Lab School (BLS) Habits of Mind to raise the rigor in curriculum across grades and subjects. Maps, units, and lesson plans explicitly identify the habits addressed and scaffolds, differentiation and extensions are provided in order to support all students. For example, strategies across the curricula include sentence starters, Socratic seminars, and graphic organizers.
- Teacher teams work to revise plans to ensure access to curricula and cognitive engagement for all students. Teams support each other as they shift from Regents driven instruction to rigorous practice that requires higher order thinking skills and the BLS Habits of Mind. As a result of this work, unit plans across content areas, reveal tasks that center around evidence-based writing, student to student discussion, and inquiry.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, pedagogical practices inconsistently reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. There is uneven student engagement and high levels of thinking.

Impact

Inconsistent implementation of the school's instructional beliefs across classrooms leads to varying levels of alignment to the curricula and the instructional shifts. As a result, in some classrooms students are not involved in appropriately challenging tasks or discussions that lead to high-level thinking and meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus is centered on creating student-centered classrooms with scaffolds for engaging every student in rigorous and meaningful work so that students can deepen their Habits of Mind. However, impact of this focus has not yet reached most classrooms visited. In one ELA class, students were working in stations on differentiated tasks associated with a proposal for a semester-long writing piece, yet in other classes, scaffolds to support student-centered lessons were not present. In a social studies class, scaffolds were not provided leading to students struggle with the level of text. In both a math and a science class, the observed portion of the lesson was teacher-centered, with teachers verbally questioning the full-class for the entire time. Moreover, students were either unaware of the BLSLab Habits of Mind or were unable to articulate the habit they were working on.
- Across classrooms there was uneven student engagement in high level discussion. In a majority of classrooms, teachers posed verbal questions to the entire class and relied on volunteers to answer. Although some questions posed were high level, this practice created an environment where a few students were engaged. Additionally, in classrooms where students were working independently there was a lack of structured interaction between peers. Where students were in groups multiple instances of groups of students participating in discussions not pertaining to the task was observed. Additionally in both an art class and science class opportunities for peers to engage in purposeful discussion was not in evidenced.
- Student work products did not consistently reflect high levels of thinking and participation. In an ELA class, students were working on proposal letters, character profiling, and individual chapter synopsis for an extensive writing project. Yet, in other classes this type of engagement was not seen. In an art class, students were cutting out pictures from magazines. In a science class, students were copying information from textbooks. In a math class, the vast majority of students did not participate in or produce meaningful work products. Additionally, in a social studies class, students were observed leaving the room without completing the exit assignment.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use common assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. The data gathered is used to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

Common assessments and rubrics provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding their achievement. Effective adjustments are made to the curriculum meeting all students learning needs promoting increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, and a school-wide grading policy to provide feedback on student achievement. Grading and assessment is driven by the implementation of the Habits of Mind and the Consortium rubrics. As a result, there is school-wide coherence around assessment that centers on argument, evidence, counter-evidence, and real-world application. Data from this work has revealed that students are able to perform at a higher level than originally thought and that students struggle with greater complexity in argumentative and analytical writing.
- The school uses common assessments to track and monitor student progress. Students engage in panels and roundtables using Consortium rubrics to present authentic discussions about their work. Teachers receive training so they can create authentic, rigorous, and student-centered assessments, which help students reflect on their work products and take responsibility for their own learning. Conversations with students reveal understanding of these assessments. Students were also able to articulate, why, and how the rubrics help them become better students.
- Common assessment analysis drives curricular and instructional adjustments. A Student Tracking Academic Response team collaborates with grade level teams to look at student data, work products, self-assessments, teacher assessments, and other artifacts to inform curricula and instructional shifts. Teachers participate in school-wide, department, and grade team meetings to review assessments and student work. Performance Based Assessment Task presentations provide data and next steps for teams. Examples of next steps that have been generated from roundtables include; the need to increase accountable talk, when to use scaffolds and when to remove them, and promoting student ownership of actionable next steps. Teachers then implement instructional adjustments accordingly.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers and staff maintain a culture for learning that communicates high expectations connected to a path towards college and career readiness. All students and families are provided detailed feedback and ongoing guidance supports.

Impact

Instructional support along with guidance, and advisement programs provide students and their families the necessary understanding of the next steps to be taken in planning for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- The school community offers students multiple opportunities to engage in work that prepares them for the next level. The use of the Habits of Mind for critical thinking, performance-based assessment tasks (PBAT), students defending their work before staff members, junior and senior enrollment in College Now courses, senior student internships, and the development of community values and community-building through restorative practices are examples of the strong college and career readiness systems provided all learners.
- Students and families receive ongoing feedback to help them understand their progress towards expectations. Parents reported receiving information on their child's progress on a regular basis. The online grading system, letters, progress reports, a monthly parent newsletter, financial aid workshop, curriculum night, parent conferences, and monthly PTA meetings promote this understanding. Students further reported receiving feedback personally through the online grading system, the use of rubrics, teacher comments on their work, and by attending teacher office hours.
- The school's advisory program supports students as they prepare for each level. The program is aligned to the College and Career Readiness anchor standards and school-wide essential questions guide the work of the program. Essential questions include "Who am I", "How am I doing", "Where am I going", and "How am I going to get there." There is an advisory rubric that assesses discussion, reading-writing, group-building, and academic awareness. The goals of the program are to provide academic advisement, college awareness, social skill building, and to develop readers and writers.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership	Rating:	Proficient
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Finding

The principal ensures that the majority of teachers engage in ongoing structured professional collaborations to promote the achievement of school goals. Distributed leadership structures provide opportunities for teachers to lead multiple teams.

Impact

Structured professional collaborations contribute to the progress toward a transition to a consortium school and improved student learning. A distributed leadership structure builds leadership capacity and provides teachers with a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams regularly utilize student data to strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers and impact student achievement. Department, grade, and advisory teams use qualitative, diagnostic, attendance, and credit accumulation data, as well as data gathered from examining student work, to develop professional development, plan town hall discussions, and develop grade and content specific best practices. For example the development and dissemination of Consortium Roundtables and PBATs is an outgrowth of their team collaborations.
- Distributed leadership is embedded in the school culture. The school has multiple leadership teams that meet on a weekly basis. Teams include departments, grades, advisory, Student Tracking Academic Response Team, and Visionary team. These teams assist with ensuring every staff member has a voice in the key decisions of the school. They promote professional collaboration and directly impact school-wide initiatives and teaching practices.
- As a result of looking at student work and data, teachers have identified gaps, revised instruction, lessons, and materials for students, and adopted instructional strategies across teams. For example, teacher teams have identified that analyzing and making connections is something students struggle with. As a result, teachers are focusing on metacognition and student realization of their achievement level. The use of exit slips, open note quizzes, and self-assessment are all strategies employed to this end.