



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Bronx Writing Academy

Middle School 323

**270 East 167TH Street
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Kamar Samuels

**Date of review: January 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Leticia Rodriguez-Rosario**

The School Context

The Bronx Writing Academy is a middle school with 497 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 32% Black, 66% Hispanic, 0% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 30% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87%.

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	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	Proficient
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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Through highly structured professional collaborations, all staff members meet regularly in teams to analyze student work and data and collaboratively refine curricula and instructional practices.

Impact

Teacher collaborations across grades and content areas contribute to ongoing improvement in teaching practice and positively impact student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- As evidenced by teachers' schedules, the school leader has designated time during the school day for interdisciplinary teacher team meetings / pods, where all teachers are engaged in inquiry based collaborations. Core teachers are grouped in teams of four with each team consisting of one math, one English language arts, one social studies and one science teacher. This team or pod teaches three sections of students, sharing responsibility for their learning. Pod and department teams meet twice a week, with support from peer instructional coaches and demonstration teachers.
- Scheduled teacher pod meetings support data/student work analysis that uncovers trends and patterns which are used to create and adjust instructional tasks and curricula to meet student needs. For example, argumentative writing units across content have been developed in support of the Common Core Learning Standards and incorporate academic vocabulary which have led to student progress, as evidenced by school data reviewed.
- Teacher teams systematically analyze data streams to monitor progress. During a teacher team meeting a math teacher shared with the assistant principal, the results of a first versus a second assessment given to students after a re-teach. On the second assessment, there was evidence of many students reaching mastery in the conversion of fractions to decimals, which was attributed to the re-teaching of the topic after the analysis of results of the first assessment.
- During team meetings teachers share best practices. For example, an English as a Second Language teacher shared how she has incorporated more leveled texts, close reading strategies and visuals for vocabulary to support the English language learners in her group, after reviewing data/student work and participating in teacher team work. School documents show that these practices have become consistent school wide.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While a majority of teachers use the workshop model and provide students with opportunities to engage in group work and text based discussion, student centered instruction is not yet a deeply embedded practice in a few classrooms.

Impact

There are missed opportunities to further engage all students in tasks that push them to take ownership of their learning across all content areas.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms there was evidence that teachers use a variety of techniques (technology, questioning, hands on activities, group work) to engage students in activities that promote higher order thinking. For example, in a science class, groups of students were seen using weights and a yard stick to measure and weigh specific items to test the hypotheses that heavier items fall at a faster rate. Bulletin boards and student portfolios also showed high level student work, with examples of argumentative and narrative writing across subject areas.
- Across classrooms tasks were scaffolded to ensure access for all learners. For example in a social studies class for English language learners, students worked in groups to make meaning as they engaged in reading primary documents. To identify unknown words, they used each other as resources for definitions, made inferences from context clues (supported by the teacher's mini lesson) and referred to dictionaries provided by the teacher to support their understanding of the text.
- During a classroom observation students were highly engaged in discussing a text. One student noted that, "Helen was scared, because she did not know what it is like in America. She does not know the customs." Another student asked the group if they agreed and if there was evidence to support that statement. Similarly, a high level of participation in discussion was evident in a literacy classroom where students were engaged in discussions in literature circles, with books of their choice and level. These demonstrations of high levels of student participation and movement to ownership of learning, via sustained peer to peer discussion, were not seen in some of the other classrooms visited.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school's curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and other content standards, with tasks that reflect the instructional shifts and are cognitively challenging for all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

Curricula across grades and subjects offer all learners opportunities to participate in engaging learning activities that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Common Core aligned materials from CMP3 supplemented by Engage NY for math and Code X for literacy. The New York City Scope and Sequence is used for instruction in science and social studies. Unit plans illustrate teachers' focus on use of technology, questioning /discussion, tasks that target multiple learning styles, student self/peer assessment, student directed activities, student choice and real world connections, as entry points to rigorous curricula for all students.
- Teacher teams reported that a core of teachers supported by network staff adjusted tasks based on data and student work to ensure access for all learners including English Language Learners and students with disabilities. They incorporated leveled texts and used strategies such as close reading, technology based instruction, visuals and opportunities for student to student discussions in unit / lesson plans.
- Teachers reported that an initial multiple intelligences survey was used to identify student learning styles and incorporate them in differentiated tasks and approaches in lesson units and plans. Ten percent of students were identified as "linguistic", six percent were "logical mathematical", twelve percent were "intrapersonal", five percent "interpersonal", twenty percent "musical", twenty eight "bodily-kinesthetic", ten percent "naturalistic", and seven percent "visual-spatial". Based on this diversity, the teams of teachers worked together to design tasks with multiple entry points. For example, they developed an argumentative writing task on immigration where students were asked to take a stand on laws on immigration. Students were provided with vocabulary support, direct instruction and use of technology to support this work.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments as tools to determine student progress towards learning goals and to identify needed adjustments to curricula and instruction that improve levels of student achievement.

Impact

Teachers use data to make adjustments to lessons to meet students' learning needs and engage students in peer and self-assessment that keep them informed of their progress in learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has implemented a new data analysis tool called “Mastery Connect” which, along with specific protocols, is used by teacher teams to monitor student progress and adjust curricular decisions, by incorporating more technology and hands on tasks and by explicitly teaching academic vocabulary to support all learners, especially English Language Learners and students with disabilities.
- Teachers work in pods where they review data from assessments and student work to adjust curriculum and teacher moves. For example during a math meeting, a teacher working with the assistant principal used the item analysis from “Mastery Connect” to figure out students’ misconceptions in order to plan for the reteach.
- Students engage in peer to peer as well as self-assessments of their learning across classrooms. For example, during a math class students addressed the question of which percent gave them a better deal. The teacher provided a checklist that the students used to assess the correctness of their responses. A student explained that the class monitors their mastery daily. He stated that the class was at 80% the day before and they were aiming for “at least 85% today”.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently message high expectations to all stakeholders and implement varied structures and tools that support attainment of the expectations.

Impact

The school's consistent emphasis on high expectations has led to increased student engagement, teacher collaboration and strong partnerships with families.

Supporting Evidence

- Administrators set high expectations for teachers as evidenced by feedback provided to teachers using the Danielson Framework during observation cycles which reflect the connection between feedback and school goals. For example, one of the school's goals is to actively engage students in learning so after observing a teacher led class discussion, the administrator provided a next step which advised the teacher to step back after posing a question and allow students to lead discussions.
- The school as a whole projects high expectations. The school has an open door policy which applies to all staff, teachers reported that they pop into each other's room to share practices or to get support, and teachers and parents reported that teachers are in constant communication with families. The administration reaches out to incoming students through feeder school visits and a June orientation event where the new students and their parents visit classrooms, learn about school expectations for all and speak to staff and students.
- During the parent meeting several parents shared their understanding of the school's expectations. They mentioned the Regents and language classes offered, the positive phone calls, E-blasts, support with the high school transition, and the messages on the school's website, as ways in which they are kept informed about school events and expectations. One parent stated that her child's disability has changed to, "an ability", due to the interaction and communication between her family and the school.
- During the student meeting when asked about school goals, every student shared the expectation of college and career readiness. They referenced the courses they were taking, explained how the afterschool program affords them choice as well as Regents' classes and reported access to apprenticeships, through Citizenship teachers from Google, Face Book, law offices, and architecture firms.