



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bronx River High School

High School X349

**3000 East Tremont Avenue
Bronx
NY 10461**

Principal: Gregory Fuchek

**Date of review: April 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Renardo Wright**

The School Context

Bronx River High School is a high school with 205 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 31% Black, 61% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Asian students, 2% Native Indian or Alaska Native, and 3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific native. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86.0%.

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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	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	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and staff align assessments to curricula, and use on-going assessments, rubrics and grading practices to analyze data on student learning outcomes and mastery of content and skills. Teachers effectively use ongoing check for understanding.

Impact

The school's use of common assessments, data analysis and ongoing checks for understanding allows teachers to give actionable feedback and make thoughtful instructional adjustments at the classroom and teacher team levels to meet the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have incorporated Achieve 3000, an online reading program that consistently assesses and monitors students' reading abilities across the different content areas. Students are grouped according to their reading abilities and interventions are provided as needed. This online reading program requires students to read cross-curricular articles presented at their Lexile levels where they must summarize and respond to various questions. All students are programmed for one period per day.
- Weekly and monthly writing assessments are embedded across the grades to constantly monitor students' progress. School leaders' and teachers' use of these writing assessments is to chart students' progress based on a 1-6 level universal writing rubric. Assessments results provide school leaders and teachers the opportunities to properly place students with additional writing supports from teacher assistants.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms observed, teachers consistently checked for understanding during the lessons. It was noted that teachers used conferring, exit slips, and various questioning strategies to assess students' understanding during the lessons. For example, in a 9th grade math class, students were asked to take out their exit slips and explain their understandings with their assigned partners. In another classroom, a 9th grade English class, students were seated in groups where they were conferring with the classroom teachers and assistants as they worked on assigned tasks.
- The school has partnered with Blue Engine to support ongoing math and writing assessments to monitor students' progress across the school. Blue Engine provides school leaders with assessment reports that outline the performance progress of their students according to their grades and with similar students in different schools across the city.
- The school has a grading policy that details a standards-based grading rubric for all subjects. During the visit, the use of rubrics accompanied by feedback from teachers to students was evident in hallways and across classrooms. While reviewing student work, it was noted that there was clear, actionable feedback provided to students and it referenced content-specific rubrics. For example, a student shared his math work with a rubric attached with the following next steps: "Graph more complicated polygons on the coordinate plane and reflect entire figures across the axes."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Although the school leaders ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts, there is not yet coherence across all grades and subjects. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

Critical thinking order skills and academic tasks are embedded into the curriculum so that all students are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers emphasized higher order thinking skills using the Depth of Knowledge Wheel. While reviewing lessons plans, essential questions and key ideas were included in lesson planning. For example, a 9th grade English lesson plan involving the reading of *Othello* asked, "Why do humans betray one another and where does power come from?" Another global history lesson plan asked students, "What can you tell about Mansa Musa from the above account? How did he view himself and what can you infer about the extent of his wealth?"
- Samples of reviewed curriculum units across different content areas provided evidence of the alignment to the Common Core and include the instructional shifts. For example, a 9th grade English unit plan required students to cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences from an informational text. A 9th grade global history curriculum unit plan required students to write arguments focused on content using informational and explanatory texts.
- The math curricula incorporate learning objectives that promote and foster reasoning and problem solving to cognitively engage all students. For example, a 9th grade algebra unit plan requires students to solve complex equations with variables on both sides and justify each step in the solution process. In addition, students are required to determine the domain and range of a linear function, determine their reasonableness, and represent them using inequalities. In a 10th grade geometry unit plan, students are required to use angles of elevations and depression to solve problems. In addition, students were required to provide reasoning to connect algebra and geometry.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, lessons are aligned to the school's instructional focus and provide multiple entry points into the instructional lessons for learners.

Impact

School-wide, learners were actively engaged and there were multiple opportunities to promote higher order thinking skills and high-level discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus, literacy across the curriculum, was evident across all lesson plans and classrooms visited. Reviewed lesson plans and classroom visits all required writing from students. For example, in a 9th grade Living Science class, students were required to write about their offspring predictions as part of a lesson on genetics and heredity to recognize the historical development of ideas in science. In another 9th class Global History classroom, students were asked to write their responses to the growth and development of the West African trading kingdom of Mali.
- Across two classrooms, lessons were modified and differentiated to meet the learning needs of the diverse learners. In a 9th grade Global History class, the teacher provided two different learning performance tasks for different learners. Task A was designed for students performing at or above level while Task B was modified and designed for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. In addition, lesson handouts were also provided in Arabic to support ELLs in the classrooms. In a 9th grade English class, students were assigned to work in small groups with teacher assistants from Blue Engine to help support their learning as they address the assigned reading and writing tasks.
- Across some classrooms, lessons were cognitively challenging to promote higher order thinking skills and meaningful discussions. For example, in a 10th grade English class, students were seated in a large circle engaged in a Socratic Seminar where they were provided the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions related to the assigned literacy task. Protocols, rubrics, and self-evaluation forms were provided for students to use during the process to support their discussions and evaluate their peers. In a 9th grade math class, students were presented with advanced math problems and directed to solve them verbally with their peers using appropriate academic vocabulary.
- Across classrooms, lesson plans included a range of questioning strategies from the Depth of Knowledge Wheel to encourage students to analyze, problem solve, make predictions, and compare and contrast using texts. For example, 9th grade English students were instructed to compare and contrast Medea to a strong modern woman.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty have established a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to students and families and provide supports to achieve those expectations.

Impact

Ongoing communications and high expectations for all students are creating pathways toward college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of the school year, school leaders provide a handbook for students that outlines clear expectations and responsibilities. The student handbook also includes the school’s mission, vision, grading policy, attendance requirements, dress codes, core values, and promotion and graduation policies. Teachers and parents are provided copies to encourage student success while at the school.
- School leaders have incorporated high standards by which all students are expected to take mock Regents exams and achieve a score of 80 or higher to be college ready. While meeting with school leaders, it was shared that students who successfully score 80 or higher on their mock Regents exams are well prepared for the actual exam and are college ready, and this same message is shared with students and families. Students are provided the opportunity to attend college preparation classes and visit local and state colleges. In addition, college preparation teachers are made available to provide support for students as they prepare to apply to and attend college.
- Ongoing feedback to families to understand their children’s academic and social progress is consistently given via phone calls, letters, emails and an interactive internet communication tool called Pupil Path. During the parent meeting, it was expressed that school leaders and teachers were able to share information through Pupil Path concerning all students’ grades, class projects, attendance, homework assignments, and social behaviors. Since this system is interactive, families and school members can engage in ongoing communication and feedback.
- School leaders and teachers have designed and incorporated a six-point writing rubric that is aligned to the Common Core Standards to ensure that students are meeting the writing standards needed for college. Across English classes, students are expected to score a level 5 in order to be college ready. During the principal meeting, it was shared that students in grade 9 were expected to average level 3 by the end of the school year, while 10th grade students are expected to average level 4. While meeting with students, it was expressed that they are constantly made aware of the writing expectations and their next steps set by teachers and administrators.

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

The great majority of teachers engage in structured professional collaborations during which pedagogical practices, student work, and common assessments are reviewed and analyzed. Distributed leadership is embedded across the school.

Impact

The work of shared leadership and teacher teams has strengthened teacher collaboration resulting in improvements to pedagogical practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders provide opportunities on Thursdays for professional collaboration built around the Critical Friends framework designed to provide professional development that focus on improving teaching practices and student learning. While meeting with the team, it was shared that each teacher is responsible for bringing student work to be reviewed and discussed by the team members for improvements through the use of a tuning protocol. During the meetings, team members were given the opportunity to make suggestions to their colleagues on what teaching strategies or lesson plans may best be used for improving students' learning outcomes. Teachers expressed that several meeting discussions have led to peer-to-peer coaching and inter-classroom visits.
- School leaders use teachers across the school to serve as department chairs. Department chairs work closely with both teachers and administrators on instructional and curriculum matters. Since department chairs serve on both the principal cabinet and teacher teams, they become the mouthpiece for teachers and play an integral role in decision-making at the school level. During teacher team meeting, teachers expressed how department chairs also serve as instructional leaders for teachers across the school. They facilitate and lead grade meetings and then this information is shared across grades and with leadership team. For example, department chairs are responsible for curriculum development and resources. In addition, they are key players in the creation of the school's professional development plan.
- School leaders provide opportunities for math teachers and Blue Engine staff members to meet as a team to review, discuss, and analyze students' work and assessments. During the visit, it was observed that the team meeting was facilitated by a Blue Engine supervisor, who provided written math assessments done by students at the school. The team used an inquiry approach as they carefully looked and reviewed several students' math assessments and discussed their findings of trends and patterns that occurred across the class or grade. Based on the results, the team agreed to reteach or implement tutorial strategies to improve students' outcomes to ensure that all learners advance academically.
- School leaders provide opportunities each week for teachers to meet as collaborative groups, alternating between grade level teams and/or department teams. Department team meetings are spearheaded by department chairs, and they address topics like curriculum writing, instructional adjustments and the instructional shifts. Grade level meetings focus on implementation of best practices to meet the needs of struggling students.