



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bronx Alliance Middle School

Middle School X355

**3750 Baychester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10466**

Principal: Jean Gallarello

**Date of review: March 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

The Bronx Alliance Middle School is a middle school with 203 students in grades 6 and 7. The school population comprises 62% Black, 31% Hispanic, 2% White, 3% Asian, and 2% other students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.5%.

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	Celebration	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	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress assessment practices consistently.

Impact

Actionable feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers use the results of common assessments to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use rubrics that are aligned to the task and provide commentary on the student's strengths and areas for improvement or next steps. For example, displayed in one class is a Grade 7 English language arts (ELA) rubric for the New York City Baseline Performance Tasks. A rubric in a 6th grade science class is graduated from well-below expectations (0) to novice (1), to apprentice (2), to practitioner (3), to expert (4) is displayed for a unit on interpreting and analyzing weather patterns. The school's growth index for the Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) reflects a steady increase from the beginning of the year assessment to the February MoSL administration.
- Teachers engage in "data dives," when they focus on MoSL data. Although teachers of math and science say they've seen growth in student performance, teachers of ELA shared that a large population of students are performing on Proficiency Levels 1 & 2. A social studies teacher stated that she has seen a positive change in student performance on the document-based questions (DBQs). Across classrooms, teacher feedback to a student is framed in terms of "glows" (strengths) and "grows" (areas for improvement/next steps) and is specific to the task. For example, feedback on a student writing assignment reads, "Glow: You accurately compare and contrast information from experiments, simulations, and videos with that gained from our texts! Grow: You must clearly organize your writing and include varied transitions."
- Students in both 6th and 7th grades said that they know they are doing well in school based on their progress reports, data on Engrade, feedback on their portfolios, and if they make the Honor Roll. However, six students interviewed did not know their reading levels. Academic work that students said they felt most proud of all included scores they received, such as one student's baseline performance task that she received a score of 2.58—though she was not clear on how this score was calculated. Another student was proud of his *Bud, Not Buddy* essay on which he received 20 of 24 points—a 4, 3, & 4 on the rubric's criteria. Another student was proud of her pictures of Hollis Wood because she "provided a literal understanding of the text and evidence." She received 2 of 3 points. Another student was proud of her math performance task score of 3. Another student was proud of the 3.1 of 3.5 points he received on his science mid-term. Another student was proud of his math test on positive and negative fractions for which he received a score of 4 of 4 because "it showed me what I could accomplish."
- Exit tickets are used frequently within this school to monitor student learning at the end of a lesson. Exit tickets responses are used by teachers to plan for the next lesson or unit of instruction.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. However, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. There is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products including the work of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs).

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus is on questioning and discussion techniques (Danielson 3b). "At a math team meeting a few weeks ago, we discussed the types of questions you can see in our classrooms," said a teacher. "We were looking at questions we could ask frequently." Asked about depth of knowledge levels of questions, a teacher responded, "Students would not be aware of the level of questions. Usually I keep it more internal."
- On the *SMART*board in a grade 6 social studies class was the following learning target in the unit entitled "Classical Civilizations": "I can understand the deities represented by Greek Mythology and the impact mythology has on the culture of the people in Ancient Greece." The teacher frontloaded the vocabulary including a definition of the word "mythology" and encouraged students to make quick text-to-world, text-to-text, and text-to-self connections. Students were responding to the "Do Now" question, "What influence do belief systems (religions) have on our everyday lives?" Following a turn & talk activity, a few students shared their responses. Student #1: "I think it has an impact because if you are a Christian, then the 10 commandments are a belief system." Student #2: "I agree, but we can believe what we believe without consequence." The teacher showed a brief BrainPOP® video about Greek mythology twice, once for general understanding and knowledge acquisition and then again to complete a family tree graphic organizer. Students were grouped heterogeneously based on their academic ability, with two higher-performing and two lower-performing students at each table. Each student was given a passage to read on his/her reading level. As students read, they extracted facts about each god/goddess to complete the graphic organizer.
- In a grade 6 mathematics Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) class, the learning target in the unit entitled "Variables and Patterns" was, "I can write an algebraic expression to describe a pattern." The general education math teacher reviewed with students the posted class agenda and presented the students with a visual pattern. She then asked students to discuss with a partner the following questions: "What do you notice? What do you wonder?" The teacher then stated to student groups, "For the next 10 minutes, you'll complete part A of this task. If you finish, you can continue to part B, or I have another pattern you can try." The groups engaged in a gallery walk at the end of the lesson. The lesson plan for this class did not differentiate this activity for students with special needs, nor did the general education teacher indicate a basis for the group compositions. The collaboration among the teachers was not seamless as the general education teacher circulated among groups of general education students and the special education teacher worked with SWDs.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
--------------------	----------------	---------	------------

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are inconsistently emphasized across grades and subjects. Curricula and academic tasks reflect planning to provide students access to the curricula and tasks

Impact

Purposeful decisions are made to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. A diversity of learners, including ELLs and SWDs, are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps are maintained digitally and are modified periodically. “We email each other lesson plans each week,” said a 6th grade teacher. “The pacing differs but it’s the same topic and units across the grade.” “This sounds much more structured than what we do on the 7th grade...it’s more anecdotal,” said another teacher.
- *Expeditionary Learning* is used for the school’s English language arts (ELA) program. However, school leaders and teachers determined that the units were too long so teachers modified the pacing of the units and incorporated more student engagement activities like “do now” activities to hook or warm students up to the lesson, partner and small group work, essential questions, and exit tickets. Revisions were also made to the sequence of the units/modules. The school also incorporated additional text at varying levels of complexity. “We have a focus on close reading, annotation, and argument writing,” said the principal. Odell Education units are used to incorporate activities related to evidence-based claims.
- The principal defined “rigor” as “materials and activities that push student thinking and is challenging to the effect that it’s a productive struggle.” “Based on my experience last year, *CMP3 (Connected Mathematics Project® 3)* can be very overwhelming for students,” said a teacher. “I try to break it down, thinking about what knowledge my kids bring to the table.” To address instruction for ELLs and SWDs, the school provides students with dictionaries, visual models and representations, and news articles and texts at different Lexile Levels, which are sometimes chunked into smaller, comprehensible passages. Math teachers shared that they’ve changed math problems to word problems to support reading comprehension. Teachers use Continental Press’ *Finish Line Mathematics* program as a supplement to *CMP3* because it addresses the development of the process skills found in the *Standards for Mathematical Practice*.
- During “Back to School Night” in September, grade 7 teachers share their syllabi with parents. Many teachers upload upcoming homework assignments on McGraw-Hill’s *Engrade* learning management platform and parents said this tool is checked regularly.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness are developing.

Impact

A system of accountability for high expectations exists in this school. Training is provided to staff and families are helped to understand student progress towards those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Professional development for faculty takes place on specific days of the week, sometimes on a per session basis. Teachers have engaged in an inter-visitation to the school with which it shares a building, Baychester Academy. The school accesses the math professional development consultant services of Creative School Services. Outside every classroom door is a sign that communicates the institution of higher education attended by the teacher and his/her major. Teachers acknowledge that students “have a hard time making real-world connections...understanding why we need to know this.” One math teacher shared that he told students, “Your parents are probably doing taxes now,” in an attempt to make a connection between a lesson on computation and application of percentages and decimals, using and applying data in tables, reasoning and problem solving with multistep problems. Another teacher said that he discusses the types of math skills needed for certain occupations like architect or construction worker.
- Homework help, recreational and enrichment activities are offered afterschool in the form of clubs and teams. The school participates in the COMPASS NYC (Comprehensive After-School System of NYC), which offers no-cost academic, recreation, enrichment and cultural activities for students. Clubs and teams offered include the environment, martial arts, photography, writers’ corner, dance, cooking, gaming, and drama.
- Teachers said they are promoting perseverance among their students. On the 2013-2014 NYC School Survey, 62% of student respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Most students at my school treat each other with respect.” When asked during the quality review how the school could be improved, students responded that there could be more focus on moral behavior, manners, and self-expression in school attire. The school has made efforts to address student behavior and school culture. Teachers shared that “most discussion during teacher team meetings is focused on school culture.” Students with “prize-winning behaviors” are celebrated with their names being placed on a display. “BAMS (Bronx Alliance Middle School) Bucks are earned by students for “living the PACT (persistence, accountability, communications, and team skills).” The “PACT” includes classroom expectations, as well as common classroom expectations. A poster describes student behaviors and incentives for being “On-PACT,” including “(a) earning good grades and being successful; (b) earning BAMS bucks and special privileges; (c) receiving positive PACT notes and positive phone calls home; (d) earning ‘best class’ or ‘best student’, a pizza party or an extra gym period.” For being “Off-PACT,” students may (a) receive a phone call to your home; (b) be referred to the dean; (e) have the principal meet with your parents; (f) miss out on BAMS special activities, trips, and celebrations; (g) have grades that will not meet standards; and (h) possibly be retained in grade.” A student interviewed objected to the statement, “We are a family” appearing on the bottom of the PACT poster, “because it doesn’t always feel that way.”

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	---	----------------	-------------------

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on teams that are loosely connected to school goals. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students on whom they are focused.

Impact

There have been shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. There is effective teacher leadership with teachers playing an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade level meetings within this school are new. Previously, teachers met primarily in content areas as they continue to do every Tuesday. Teachers use a “Collaborative Analysis Protocol” when looking at student work together, during which teachers bring representative samples of strong, medium, and weak student work in relation to the identified learning targets.
- In their weekly 6th grade teacher team meeting, eight teachers discussed a variety of administrative topics. The agenda began with an icebreaker question, “What’s your favorite aspect of being a teacher?” This was followed by reflection on a meeting held with the parents of one student identified as overage for his grade regarding a behavioral issue. A teacher reported that the student was experiencing some success with the implementation of bathroom logs and conduct sheets. The team’s conversation then turned to a student who was recently discussed at a child study team meeting given an annual Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting scheduled for the following week. The concern was the lack of work being produced by this student. A tool called “Student Talk” was shared that has been used to capture student specific information, such as observed behaviors, available data, parent outreach, next steps, follow up information, outcomes, and details of an intervention plan together with the name of the teacher point person. A teacher reported a positive change in the way the student stays in his seat but he “shuts down completely.” Another teacher shared, “The student does well with BAM Bucks but it depends on the morning he has. He enjoys science and participates, but when it comes to assessment he shuts down. There has been more work from this student during this marking period than in the first two marking periods.”
- Teachers serve as grade leaders on each grade and one teacher serves as the chair of the math department. The school has a high number of new teachers and a few ATR (Active Teacher Reserve) teachers are based in this school. The principal was asked to identify teachers on her school’s table of organization based on the Boyle’s Matrix, the principal said every teacher in her building is “willing” and most were identified as “able.” There was no faculty member identified as “not willing.”