



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice

09X505

**244 EAST 163 STREET
BRONX
NY, 10451**

Principal: Meisha Ross-Porter

**Dates of review: Dec 11, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

The School Context

Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice is a Secondary School with 773 students from 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 26% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.50%.

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	Well Developed
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	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	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders' and teachers' strategic planning ensures curricula aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards, school-wide instructional coherence, and an emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

As a result of the school's thoughtful analysis of student work and data, units and lessons across content areas reflect integration of the Common Core, instructional shifts, and requiring students to demonstrate higher-order thinking, resulting in college and career readiness for all students. Curricular decisions result in college and career readiness, higher-order thinking, and student work products that require all learners to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and administrators have been engaged in creating, refining, and implementing Common Core Learning Standard units of study over the past seven years. This developmental and strategic process has included professional development by external consultants, based on the work of Doug Reeves, the Teacher Learning Center, and the use of the Tri-State Rubric, a tool to assess units for alignment, incorporating the key shifts, and embedding instructional supports. All teachers use planning templates that include learning targets, expectations for student discussions, and adjustments, such as scaffolds for vocabulary and graphic organizers for tasks. These planned supports, across all grades and content areas, diverse learners including English language learners and students with disabilities to demonstrate their thinking.
- Academic tasks reflect emphasis on rigorous habits and critical thinking. For example in science, text-based evidence is required when students respond and make claims. In English lessons, teachers use elevated accountable talk stems to ensure that discussions between students go beyond simple restatements or disagreements. In one class, a student challenged a peer to provide textual evidence before deciding to agree or disagree. In another class, students reflect on the class' improvement of participation in a Socratic seminar, requiring students to analyze the content as well as the process used in discussions.
- Revisions made to the curricula have been based on student data and work products, revealing that the lexile level of texts in lessons were below grade level appropriateness. In science and social studies, teachers selected materials that increased complexity of text resulting in a higher demand for student thinking and analysis of text at a higher level. Tasks have also been refined based on a review of student work products such as end-of-unit presentations that lead to a senior thesis, which revealed that students were only reporting information but were not demonstrating their understanding. Therefore, across grades and subjects all students have access to rigorous tasks, are required to make evidence based claims and share their interpretation and analysis of text to make their thinking visible.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across grades and subject area classrooms teachers consistently implement instructional strategies and questioning techniques that engage students in appropriately challenging tasks and discussions.

Impact

Although lessons include multiple entry points and scaffolds for diverse learners to participate in discussions and produce work that demonstrates their thinking, supports and extensions for higher achieving students are not always planned, missing opportunities for further acceleration of learning for some students.

Supporting Evidence

- In several middle school math lessons, teachers consistently require students to engage in higher order thinking and collaborative problem solving using the acronym LOCK (List, Organize, Knowledge, Calculate) to help students structure their responses and thoroughly analyze word problems. The use of scaffolds provides entry points for all learners into challenging tasks, especially in math, as students are required to solve multi-step problems. However, high quality extensions are not always planned or available for students who may not necessarily need these scaffolds. Students who complete tasks ahead of the larger group or have already mastered a particular skill in math for example have to wait for next steps given to the entire group.
- In a high school level English class, students are required to lead and participate in a text-based discussion on characters' perspectives in "To Kill a Mockingbird". Teachers facilitate discussion by asking questions without leading or infusing the answers. As a result, students are able to extrapolate big ideas from their reading to make claims and substantiate their statements with evidence from the text. Students state that this type of modeling is supporting them in developing their facilitation skills to lead discussions amongst their peers.
- Across classrooms, most lessons include opportunities for student-led discussions. In one Socratic seminar for example, students were selected to monitor accountable talk during the lesson. Their feedback included comments such as, "text evidence was present today, but it was somewhat limited" and "I was disappointed because some students disagreed with others in the group but they did not give sufficient evidence." As a result, lessons reflect high levels of student participation, self-reflection and critical thinking. Teachers are using discussion prompts and scaffolds in a decreasing manner as they work towards the goal of increased student ownership.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers use common assessments to determine mastery of standards and create a clear picture of student progress.

Impact

As a result of school-wide assessment practices, teachers have feedback about their work that results in effective adjustments to instruction. Additionally, students use meaningful teacher feedback to improve their work and meet learning goals, leading to increased student mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- In every subject and grade, teachers create Data Trackers using data from September baseline assessments aligned to selected Measures of Student Learning to monitor student mastery. In addition to student work aligned to standards based rubric scores, for grades 6 through 8, teachers use the math State exam and in high school courses teachers use the corresponding Regents and Performance Assessments to monitor individual student and class progress.
- Data trackers for individual students are based on standards and skills and inform instructional as well as individualized supports for students such as modified tasks, grouping during lessons, or additional instruction during and after school. Students consistently use data to set their own learning goals and create double bar graphs that allow them to self-reflect on their progress along a set of content standards. Mastery of standards is determined by analyzing student work and end-of-unit assessments, evaluated using common rubrics across content areas.
- Teachers are able to use standards-based mastery assessments to determine growth by topic, by skill or by standard for sets of students. Teachers then develop action plans based on the results to incorporate targeted strategies, scaffolds, and re-teaching of content in order to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Teachers administered the Degrees of Reading Power to all students to assess levels of reading comprehension. Results were used to form instructional groups based on identified areas of need. Although teachers teach one content area, the information culled from the DRP is used to integrate strategies that support student success in all content areas. For example, one school-wide strategy is annotation of text that teachers and students both agree enables learners to analyze and interpret texts of varying complexity across subject areas.
- Data analysis and protocols for looking at student work are ongoing practices across individual and teams of teachers. Data coaches offer office hours to teachers to discuss class and individual students' mastery results, discuss possible interventions, next steps, as well as instructional adjustments to meet students' needs.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and learning to the entire staff based on the Danielson framework for Teaching. The school also provides effective guidance and supports to students so that they can effectively meet the school's articulated expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability for high expectations amongst school leaders and teachers reflected in the observation and feedback process using the Danielson framework. Additionally, students are aware of how their learning connects to a path for college and career readiness and thus own their educational experiences as they prepare for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's work is grounded in the widely embrace motto- The CHARGE which stands for Collectively Helping All to Realize Greatness Every day. Staff and students say this represents their goal and mission for achieving success, not just in their daily lessons and exams but in preparation for college and life beyond graduation. All students, in grades 6 through 12, state that their teachers have high expectations for them. Whether they are struggling in class with one skill, or they have not passed an exam, they state they strive for excellence and demonstrate their best effort in all that they do.
- Some of the systems for communication for staff include the Daily Blast, the Faculty Handbook, Wednesday professional development sessions, State of Department meetings, and team leader meetings with the principal to discuss department action plans. These structures emphasize the school wide priorities of ensuring rigorous instruction, and teachers state that one common theme that has impacted their practice is the expectation that teachers are to facilitate learning for students so that they become independent and are able to own their educational experiences.
- As a result of the school's focus on the mission of preparing students for college and careers, the concerted efforts of the staff and leadership have ensured improvements in academic success and student achievement data. For example, the school has improved their 4-year graduation rate to 77%, nine points higher than the city average. Credit accumulation rates for ninth and tenth graders are also higher than the city average by three and five percentage points respectively.
- Middle school data on the School Quality Guide shows that in the area of student progress and closing the achievement gap, the school has exceeded targets. Grade 6 through 8 students state that the school expects them to advocate for themselves and to be prepared for high school and college work.
- The school's numerous partnerships with organizations such as the Bronx District Attorney's office, GEAR UP/Project Boost, Bronx Defenders and universities including Lehman College and St. John's, provide students exposure to various careers and provide leadership and character development in students' areas of interest. Internships within these and other organizations also ensure that students have first-hand experiences in various work settings.

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

Structured teacher collaboration effectively and consistently promotes the implementation of the Common Core and has strengthened instructional capacity school-wide. Teachers and teacher leaders make key decisions that affect student learning.

Impact

Embedded teacher team practices effectively support school-wide instructional coherence, teacher leadership, and improved student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participate at least once a week formally on one of the school’s structured teams: Department, Grade, Professional Learning, Lab Site, Intervisitation, and Special Education. Teachers collaborate in many other informal ways including emails, text messages, and frequent conversations outside of meeting times. Teachers state that a clear focus across all collaborations is to move instruction from teacher-directed lessons to increased student participation. As a result, there is a clear focus on the Common Core and teachers across middle and high school grades have observed increased student-to-student engagement and higher-order thinking and discussions in their classrooms.
- Teachers demonstrate strengthened instructional capacity as evidenced in detailed lessons, which include learning targets that prompt student discussion, anticipated responses, and strategies for facilitating engagement. Teachers say that by planning higher-order discussion questions and developing activities that require students to provide evidence for their claims, class sessions have shifted to increased levels of student participation. As a result of teacher-facilitated discussions, teachers say students’ written products also reveal overall improvements as students provide evidence and details in their essays.
- Distributed leadership structures are embedded across the school’s various teams. Teachers make decisions about use of strategies and texts to support student learning based on their discussion of strengths and needs they observe in their students’ work. For example an observation of student needs in reading comprehension prompted one group of teachers to focus on teaching annotation skills in their lessons. Another grade level team developed rubrics for active listening and questioning to support student led discussions. Teachers on the Professional Learning team also plan and present professional development sessions and lead new teacher orientation. These thoughtfully planned initiatives support instructional coherence and student learning school-wide.