



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Bard High School Early College

High School M696

**525 East Houston Street
Manhattan
NY 10002**

Principal: Michael Lerner

**Date of review: March 18, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier**

The School Context

Bard High School Early College is a high school with 534 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 23% Asian, 16% Black, 16% Hispanic, and 41% White students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners and 1% students with disabilities. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.8%.

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	Additional Findings	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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , 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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness with families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact

School leaders and staff successfully partner with families to support students' progress towards expectations. Teacher teams and staff have established a culture for learning that results in students' ownership of their educational experience, preparing them for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff communicate with parents through a variety of venues, some of which are as follows: Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, college information workshops, weekly email newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and individual email communications from teachers. Parents reported that the school's high expectations for students are not only evident in the aforementioned communications, but also in teachers' constant push of students to improve upon their work. Specifically, parents discussed their children's teachers focusing on students' thesis statements. High expectations were conveyed through teachers' constantly sending thesis statements back to students with feedback that both praised students' positive steps as well as provided actionable feedback on how students could improve their work. As a result of the back and forth communication in this recent project, students were empowered to make thoughtful edits, such as using complete words instead of abbreviations, that led to strengthened college level writing. Parents also specifically commended the school on the detailed comments teachers leave in the narrative portions of official report cards and in their individualized communications. Through emails, phone conferences and in-person conferences with families, parents are empowered as partners in the college and career preparedness of their children.
- The guidance staff prepares students for the next level through their College Advisory lessons delivered to all students on all grades. A parent noted that "They start talking about the process of college in the ninth grade." A sample of topics covered include: "SAT vs ACT – what can I do now?" "Resume," "Graduation Check-list," "College Challenges," "Choosing a college major," "Common College Fears," "College Choices," and "Final College Decision."
- Parents and students praised the College Transfer Office (CTO) advisory lessons. CTO is an advisory program, separate from the aforementioned, designed specifically to prepare students for their next level of college after graduating with their associates' degree. Students are provided with a monthly to-do list that guides students through the college application, acceptance and choice process, as well as a detailed calendar as to when representatives from a great variety of colleges and university representatives will visit the school. CTO Advisory lessons also guide students in the writing of application essays, understanding the financial aid application, as well as planning college visits.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs informed by the instructional shifts that fosters higher order-thinking. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula allowing most students to be engaged in appropriately challenging by tasks.

Impact

Although students demonstrate higher-order thinking skills, teaching strategies did not align with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* or provide strategic use of multiple entry points for all learners limiting student ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Whereas school leadership identified “using writing and thinking practices to foster student-to-student discussion” in its self-evaluation and during the leadership interview as being central to its belief about how students learn, these practices were reflected in only three out of the seven class visits.
- Teacher centered instruction was observed in a majority of class visits. Specifically, during a Biology class, students directly responded to questions posed by the teacher without being asked to engage in discussion with peers. Teacher centered instruction was also observed during a Literature of the Americas class wherein the discussion was teacher centered. Students were commenting on the thesis put forward by a student. However, students were directing their comments about the thesis statement to the teacher, not the student who had written the thesis statement.
- During an Art History lesson, students were engaged in a task that did not demonstrate higher order thinking. Students were instructed to read an excerpt from the text *Michelangelo’s David: A Search for Identity*. They were then instructed that they would work individually during this class period on the question labeled as “What are these fragments [two fragments of writing ... by Michelangelo on one of the artist’s drawings] and when does Seymour think they date from? This is straightforward.”
- Writing and thinking practices utilized to foster student-to-student discussion were observed in two classes. In the class visit to the Seminar course, students were analyzing a text from *A Plague of Frogs* by William Souder through the lens of perspective. The accompanied discussion as to how this understanding would be conveyed during each group’s dramatization of this work that would support and exemplify the perspective they used. In the class visit to World Literature, student groups were engaged in high-order thinking as they conducted student-to-student discussions in which they were to read a predetermined Shakespearean sonnet and together, as quoted from the lesson plan, “paraphrase the poem line by line, Identify conceits, [and] discuss [the] poem’s internal logic using the framework of octave, sestet, and couplet.”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects to continually promote college and career readiness.

Impact

School leaders and staff have created a coherent curriculum that cognitively challenges students at all levels with an emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills. Students are college and career ready by their third year at this school, graduating with an associates' degree in four years.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricular documents demonstrates academic tasks that promote college and career readiness for all students. All curricula have been developed by the school's faculty in partnership with Bard College. The curricula for year one and two of the seminar course are specifically geared toward preparing students for the cognitively challenging work they will encounter once they begin their college level courses in their third year at this school, developing students' ability to think and write about and discuss insights in a manner on par with the college level work they will be assigned during their third and fourth years at Bard as well as at the colleges they will attend after graduation. The college electives are designed in alignment with Bard's expectations.
- The Common Core State Standards, given the college and career readiness, inherent to the design of the school, is regularly assessed as the faculty engages in curricula reviews through the specific lens of the Common Core State Standards. As a result, curricula represents a systematic approach that is regularly assured of, emphasizes critical thinking, analytical approaches to material, and all the goals of Common Core.
- The writing and thinking practices of Bard College are emphasized and designed to foster student-to-student discussion, improve writing practice, and promote meta-cognitive thinking. Class discussions are rooted in the close reading of texts with an eye toward the development of analytical skills and academic vocabulary. Courses, lessons, units of study, and lessons reflect full integration of the instructional shifts embedded in Common Core Learning Standards across content areas. For example, lesson plans in English Language Arts emphasize the value of text-based evidence in argument through the development of complex thesis statements and close textual analysis.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices reflect the use of checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

School leadership and teachers designed courses to include embedded common assessments, providing consistent data to inform the college and career readiness. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices and effective adjustments meet the learning needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create common assessments such as quizzes, mid-terms, lab reports and finals to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Analysis of this data is used to adjust curricula and instruction. The math teacher team was observed using data gathered from previous assessments to design the common assessment that would be used at the close of the current instructional unit. As per the data, the math team adjusted question stems to ensure clarity of purpose and student comprehension of each question's goal. The math team also reviewed the expectations established for each question and "normed" the multi-step grading process to ensure that high expectations are coherent across this subject.
- Teachers were observed circulating throughout classes to check in with students and assess progress. The resulting support came in the form of individual conferences and clarifying questions to groups of students. For example, during a discussion of American literature, the teacher pointed out the need for students to take good notes in order to write their papers over the weekend.
- Parents and students praised the actionable feedback provided by teachers. Parents noted that students bring work home that has specific comments from the teacher aimed at helping the student rewrite or edit the work. Feedback to students is carefully crafted as to be specifically rooted in their assessment of students' individual progress. These comments also contain next steps that are specific and individually crafted to ensure that students have the opportunity to reflect and revise.
- In Literature of the Americas, a round table discussion based on peer-assessments of one student's thesis statement resulted in multiple points of actionable feedback for the writer of the thesis statement being discussed. This activity also provided multiple formative assessment data points for the teacher, not only indicating the status of the writer's product, but also evidencing students' understanding of the process of writing of a complex, college level thesis statement.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are embedded resulting in effective teacher leadership and teachers’ integral role in key decisions affecting student learning across the school.

Impact

Inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations have strengthened teacher instructional capacity, resulting in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement. Distributed leadership structures have resulted in an initiative to strengthen the school’s programmatic resemblance to a college program.

Supporting Evidence

- The math teacher team was observed while aligning a unit exam that would be delivered across the tenth grade math classes. They used data to inform their choices as to crafting the question stems to address observed student misunderstandings. The math team calibrated the scoring rubric that they had created to accompany this unit exam. In the process of designing this assessment so that it would be coherent across the grade, this team also planned how it would present this unit to the greater math department to further their endeavor to create strengthen coherence across all grades in the math department.
- Agendas from the Sophomore Seminar Teacher Team meetings evidence their work in strengthening teacher instructional capacity as they gather to discuss/plan the following: “Discuss and identify the elements of a strong midterm narrative,” “Explore potential changes to the curriculum to address concerns in midterm narrative,” and “Discuss interclass visitations and observations by administrators.” As a result of this work, there is school-wide instructional coherence around college readiness.
- Teachers making up the Chemistry team play an integral role in determining the school’s instructional focus. This team’s inquiry work has resulted in students’ dramatic gains in Chemistry Regents exam results. The failure rate fell more than 50% from the 2012-2013 school year to the 2014-2015 school year. Also deserving note is the increase in students who earned a grade of 85 or higher from 19% in the 2012-2013 in the 2012-2013 school year to 28% in the 2014-2015 school year.