



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Bronx School of Law and Finance

High School X284

**99 Terrace View Avenue
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Jessica Goring

**Date of review: March 17, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

The School Context

Bronx School of Law and Finance is a high school with 395 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 32% Black, 64% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 12% English Language Learners and 24% students with disabilities. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 82.0%.

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	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 <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	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	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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. School leaders and staff effectively communicate to students and parents the expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

As a result, mutual accountability culture for the school's high expectations has leaders and staff successfully partnering with families supporting student progress toward identified expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Professional learning serves to support the school's goals. In keeping with this expectation, administration and staff have developed a school-wide focus and protocols for argumentative writing so students know they must have claim, evidence, and rebuttal, and include the use of annotation. Two English Language Arts (ELA) department teachers facilitated a session on MEAL, which stands for main idea, evidence, and analysis, to assist teachers helping students learn to use this strategy for their argumentative writing. Additionally, teachers were surveyed to determine additional professional learning needs, and sessions that are attended off-site in support the school's initiatives, are turn keyed collaboratively to teacher teams. For example, teachers completed a technology survey and are involved with the implementation of Google Apps for Education.
- School leaders communicate high expectations through a handbook, bulletins, and memos. Specific expectations are based on school-wide data used as a basis for discussions with teachers in setting both teacher and student goals, and aligned to the school's goals. Additionally, meetings following observations provide a venue for feedback relative to expected teaching strategies that need to be evidenced during future visits. This cycle of feedback is evident in samples of observations reviewed where administration provides staff actionable feedback around expected practices of argumentative writing, annotation, checking for understanding, and discussion using accountable talk stems. Expectations are also shared during teacher team meetings, further promoting accountability.
- Administration regularly shares memos with parents, explaining expectations and a new student orientation is held yearly in support of helping students be prepared and succeed. Parents shared that they are highly pleased with the consistent communication with staff, and that "this is a partnership". Teachers contact parents weekly to convey student progress and areas in which their children need support. Both parents and students check grades on an online grade book. Although students stated they check weekly, parents stated they check-in frequently to track their children's homework, grades, and missing assignments. Teachers also share syllabi with families to outline clearly class expectations.
- Beyond weekly parent outreach by teachers, staff provides yearlong parent workshops based on parents' needs, especially to support college and career readiness. Parent workshops to date include career fairs, internships, and financial aid, and college applications. Additionally, the guidance counselor has organized multiple sessions on the college application process. Students shared that they attended and felt supported during college selection, financial aid, and an internship application processes.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, student work products, and discussions.

Impact

Uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks has bearing on all students' not suitably demonstrating higher-order thinking skills in their work products, thinking, and discussion.

Supporting Evidence

- The level of rigor and questions for all students was evident in only some classes. In an ELA class students conducted a Socratic Seminar and used accountable talk stems to discuss their evidence, claims, and counter claims. However, in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) ELA class, where students conducted a Socratic Seminar, the level of questions remained at Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels 1 and 2, not all students cited evidence for their claims, and not all students participated. Only about six students engaged in the discussion. Further, in an Advanced Placement Statistics class, although all students were engaged in a randomization game to collect data and then used a chart and dot-plot to interpret their findings, the lesson evidenced pacing that was off and rigor of the activity was minimal. The tossing and collection took an excessive amount of time precluding students from engaging in a quality discussion and completing their work during the allotted period.
- Other classes were teacher-dominated with questioning remaining at the lower levels of DOK. In a law class, although students worked on a case study, the teacher posed fill-in-the-blank questions in a ping-pong fashion from teacher-to-student and back again. For example, questions such as "What does it mean to keep a balance?", "What do we need to start the investigation?", and "What if we don't have enough evidence?" were asked and answered by only a few students. Similarly, in a trigonometry class, students sat in rows and worked on solving a Do Now and some classwork problems. Although the teacher suggested students could connect with a partner for support, most students did not share their thinking in this informal grouping and when asked if they understood, a few verbalized their confusion.
- In a Living Environment class for English Language Learners (ELL), students conducted a lab in data-determined groups using manipulatives and translated texts. Yet, the pacing, unclear instructions, and the lack of quality discourse between students and the classroom teacher and bilingual teacher in the room, especially with bilingual students, during the experiments, resulted in the completion of the exit ticket past the bell ending the period. In a Global History class, students were provided with a short video and modified text to support student access to the materials. However, questions posed by the teacher moved from teacher-to-student and back again, with lost opportunities high-level conversation and for positive student-to-student interaction.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty adopted selected curricula to ensure that they are providing instruction aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and use student data to plan and refine rigorous academic tasks.

Impact

The school's refinement of curricula enables school wide coherence and provides for college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks are planned so that all students have access and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration shared that they and teacher leaders work collaboratively to support staff to adjust the Common Core-aligned adopted materials such as *EngageNY* for English Language Arts (ELA), *A2i* for math, *New Visions* social studies and science, and *National Academy Foundation* (NAF), for law and justice. A review of curriculum maps and lesson plans indicated that teachers have planned with the end in mind, using essential questions, enduring understandings, assessments, and skills to create a view of the unit as a whole, as well as planning the smaller components of the lesson plan. Also evident in curriculum maps, units plans, and lesson plans are the assessments, rubrics, and scaffolds, planned by teachers, to ensure that all students have access to curricula aligned to the Common Core and New York State standards.
- To meet students' needs, recognizing that 12% are English Language Learners (ELLs) and 24% are students with disabilities, staff and administration used baseline data, to program the lowest performers into a double math class, one being a transition program and the other algebra. For the transition class, staff utilized the data and adjusted the scope and sequence in order to reteach the needed specific foundational skills, to support students' success in algebra.
- A review of lesson plans indicates that across the school an agreed upon format is implemented with a focus on aim, goals, objectives, vocabulary, differentiation, and assessment. Each lesson demonstrates plans to provide access for all learners, with activities for English as a New Language (ENL) students, and students with disabilities. Some lesson plans delineate pivotal questions that spiral up from Webb's DOK level 1 to level 3. Assessments such as short discussions and exit tickets, as well as essays, labs, and summative tests, are common additions.
- Curriculum maps indicated the instructional shifts, especially in the areas of constructing arguments and implementing annotations. Further evident are lesson revisions based on student work and data to support reteaching. For example, in an earth science class, the teacher used an initial assignment to determine if students were able to arrange rocks from oldest to youngest. The results of this assessment were used to inform instruction for reteaching. Another assessment was provided whereby the students were able to sequence the rocks but still had trouble with providing evidence for their answers. Consequently, the teacher conducted another lesson, and the ensuing assessment found that students had improved in both dating the rocks and providing evidence of their age.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across the school, common assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula are utilized to identify student performance and progress toward goals.

Impact

The staff analyzes common assessments to provide a mutual lens and language to discuss student progress and inform instructional adjustments to advance student achievement, and teachers provide actionable feedback to students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have aligned assessments to the curricula and created or aligned rubrics and checklists to support student achievement. Students know how to use rubrics and checklists to help determine completion of assignments, understand the resulting ratings, and for support in revising their work. Students agreed that they use a rubric to “follow the elements in the 4 and include them in your work. Also you don’t want to go half way with it or you will get less than a 4.”
- Teachers provide students with feedback, rooted in the rubric language and attach it to their work, and post the work on bulletin boards in and outside the classrooms. This actionable feedback includes highlights and areas to improve. For example, one essay feedback stated, “You have everything they ask for, but you need to work on writing using detail in your analysis.” When asked, students can explain their next step for upcoming assignments according to the teacher’s feedback. Student notebooks and folders show student work that includes, to a large degree, teacher responses in specific actionable feedback, a grade, additional checkmarks, and some statements of encouragement, like “great job” or “excellent.”
- Teachers have determined a set of school wide assessments, including the Measure of Student Learning (MOSL), mock Regents, mock advanced placement exams, and curricula-based formative and summative assessments, all of which are used to determine student progress toward goals. They employ a consistent data cycle that includes teaching a lesson, analyzing student work for mastery, areas of need, reteaching, and regrouping, according to student need, and then reassessing. As a result, teachers demonstrated curricula revisions based on data and student work, the revising of student groups, and ways in which they differentiate instruction.
- Teachers use the analysis of the Regents data to determine next instructional steps. To that end, staff implemented the school wide initiative of argumentative writing and use of MEAL, to which they attribute the positive results for the January Regents’ scores. An analysis of the January Regents results showed 92% of students (63 of 72 students) who took the assessment passed, with 54% (37 students) receiving 65-84% and 38% (26 students) receiving 85-100%.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher Teams	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards, strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers who have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are engaged in several teams, including but not limited to subject, grade, and Learning Partners. Teachers have common planning time built into their schedules to meet for collaborative work during the school day and to engage in professional learning. The English department team stated that one of their major functions is to demonstrate methods for building literacy skills of the Common Core Learning Standards for use in all subjects across the school to implement claim, counterclaim, and rebuttal. Teachers then created and shared during professional development a technique called MEAL, as a memory device for students to use when writing.
- One of the teacher teams demonstrated the protocol for analyzing student work and data, from which they determined the areas of need, created an action plan, discussed next instructional steps, and set a check-in date to review student performance. Team members stated that this protocol has helped them to impact student achievement. For example, the pass rate on the English Regents increased from 82 to 92%, with all sophomores passing with at least a 75%, demonstrating college and career readiness. Additionally, the Learning Partners team is working on implementing accountable talk stems to further student discussion and engagement in all classrooms across the school.
- Teacher leaders facilitate the team meetings with the support and collaboration of its members. Teachers stated that sharing best practices has positively impacted their professional growth as they learn from each other. One teacher shared and others agreed, "For me this team has been extremely valuable as I'm a first year teacher. Everyone here helps me with common language, advice, mentoring, to implement strategies, and my teaching has definitely grown because of this team." Another teacher summed up the team's comments by stating, "I think working with the team has helped clarify my understanding of the New York State and Common Core Learning Standards, examine and connect to our units and lesson plans with strategies, and bounce those ideas back and forth."
- As an outgrowth of being part of Learning Partners for three years, the staff has developed a best practices matrix that denotes which teacher is a resource for specific instructional strategies, such as questioning, how to provide feedback, differentiating instruction for ENL students, or providing multiple entry points. Teachers stated that they use this matrix to find support from colleagues in crafting or revising lessons. This year's focus for Learning Partners is to incorporate accountable talk discussions into lessons. As a result in a review of lesson plans, discussion strategies such as turn-and-talk, Socratic Seminars, mock trials, and fishbowls, were embedded.