



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

**Bronx Early College Academy for Teaching &
Learning**

Middle School X324

**250 East 164 Street
Bronx
NY, 10456**

Principal: Yvette Rivera

**Date of review: March 30, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

Bronx Early College Academy for Teaching & Learning is a middle school with 504 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 29% Black, 66% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 13% English Language Learners and 18% students with disabilities. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.5%.

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	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	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	Focus	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	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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for professionalism and instruction to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

School leaders set expectations, provide training and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School staff have established a culture of learning that provides students with ongoing feedback for their next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have set an instructional focus of improving rigorous instruction and student engagement, which are domains on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. To support teachers in meeting these expectations, the principal provides teachers with professional development and coaching from The New York City Writing Project. This professional development focuses on strengthening lesson planning to ensure student engagement. School leaders provide teachers with feedback and hold them accountable through observations. A review of teacher observations reveals feedback aligned to increasing engagement such as “It may help students to be more conscious of their presentation if they are also provided with a format to provide each other with constructive feedback based on the teacher rubric.” Another observation suggested “Give students an answer key and have them score each other or themselves then determine where they struggled” and went on to suggest that the teacher should put the ownership on the students.
- In a conversation with students, they shared how teachers and guidance personnel have connected the learning at the school to expectations for career and college readiness. Students specifically cited the early access and preparation so that they could take Regents exams in grade eight, as evidence of the school’s high expectations for them. Students stated that there is an expectation for them to attend college and the school provides assistance with college applications, writing the personal essay, and applying for financial aid.
- Students shared their work products and the teacher feedback that supported students moving towards the next level. For example, a student shared that teacher feedback on her historical fiction journal entry written in French for her French language course helped her realize that she focused too much on the grammar of language and not enough on building her character as a fighter in the French Resistance. Similarly, another student shared that through conferencing with his teacher while he was writing his rumination paper, which is a reflection of his learning, he realized that he should focus less on connecting quotes from his readings to other materials and more on analyzing the quotes. Students of all grades were able to connect their ability to analyze and communicate in person and in writing to aspects of their post-secondary life.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

While adjustments are made and students receive actionable feedback there are missed opportunities to makes students aware of their next learning step.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use and have created a variety of rubrics aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards to provide students very clear feedback about their work. For example, feedback on one piece of student writing stated, "you have a great flow", "state the point clearly", "use a quote, and make a reference to the quote", and "next time you could have more analysis." Similarly, feedback on a math task stated, "Great job in including key words that correlated with the mathematical operations and showing each step in the solution and following PEMDAS." While this feedback provides students and teachers with actionable information about how to improve their work, it does not always provide a clear portrait of student mastery.
- The posted grading policies, which are aligned to the course curriculum, include detailed expectations for students and provide the percent for each component. For example, in one class, assessment is worth 30% and includes quizzes, in-class essays, and projects, class participation is 40% of the grade. In a grade 9 language class, homework is worth 15%, exams and projects are 30% each and participation is 25%. As a result, students know how their grade is calculated for each course.
- Checks for understanding happen in both large and small groups. For example, during a math class focusing on solving equations with two variables, the teacher noticed that students did not understand that when solving an equation involving tickets sold for a dance that the price doubled for couples. The teacher addressed this misunderstanding by having a few students read the problem and explain how it should be set up. In a grade 11 class, students worked independently on a literary essay. The teacher conferenced with students and posed a series of clarifying questions about why they selected a quote and how it related to their personal life. This teacher was observed recording information from these conferences with students, in order to document class participation.
- There are opportunities for students to engage in peer and self-assessment. For example, in one grade 8 English Language Arts (ELA) class, students used a bank of questions from the New York State exam to practice and design their own text-dependent questions. Students shared their questions with classmates who would answer them and provide additional feedback. However, in another class, the teacher divided students into partners. One partner read their work while the other took notes and then used the sentence starter "I heard you say..." to repeat what their partner said. While there were frequent opportunities for peer and self-reflection, they did not always result in the teacher gathering information to adjust instruction.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking.

Impact

The school philosophy of student engagement through question and discussion was observed across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has identified an instructional practice with the acronym of DRUI (Daily Routine for Unfolding Instruction) and this is a unifying framework. This practice requires teachers to plan and deliver lessons that require student engagement and to post learning goals so that students know what they are working towards in class. This framework, along with guiding questions for students, was observed across classrooms and served as a framework for class instruction.
- In a grade 8 Earth Science Regents class, students examined the variation in latitude in the sun's path during the different seasons. The teacher used an interactive white board to display a picture of the earth with latitudes clearly marked and asked questions about the latitude that the sun was warming at each season. While the teacher initiated the discussion, students quickly began to ask questions about how the size of the land mass might affect insolation. In a Global History class, students worked in small groups to make inferences about the use of World War II propaganda posters. Students discussed the posters by describing what they saw and helped each other to make inferences about the poster. The teacher went to each group of students asking them what they saw and telling them to remember previous conversations. One group of students was studying a poster of soldiers riding in a Jeep that said, "They have more important places to go than you." The accompanying worksheet asked students to identify the resource, what the government was asking, and how Americans can contribute to the war effort. The students determined that the government wanted Americans to save their rubber tires for the war effort.
- In an Integrated Co-Teaching grade 6 class, students had to read two articles that presented differing opinions on owl preservation and engaged in high-level discussions as they prepared to write an argumentative essay. Students engaged in structured conversations about what details to include on each side of the Venn diagram and referred back to each article for supporting details. When asked why one article advocated shooting the owls, a group of students went back to the article. They were able to cite text to demonstrate that although it seemed like a contradiction to shoot owls it was actually preservation because the owls being shot were ones that had a large population and these were endangering the rare owls.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core and content standards integrate the instructional shifts. Academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Students are immersed in curriculum that purposely integrates the instructional shifts and cognitively engages students to promote career and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses several curricula to meet the needs of their grade 6 to 12 students. In grades 6 through 8, students are engaged in the Common Core-aligned programs *Expeditionary Learning* for literacy and *CMP3* for math. In grades 9 through 12, the school uses the International Baccalaureate as the framework for integrating the Common Core and developing units of study.
- A review of lessons across all grades reveals a focus on the use of vocabulary in context and the use of annotations and close reading of complex texts. Lessons list the learning objectives and essential questions associated with the grade-level Common Core or content standards, vocabulary for the unit, a mini-lesson, procedures, assessment, homework, and some indicate how students, such as English Language Learners and students with disabilities will be grouped for differentiated instruction. In one grade 8 English unit, students read various non-fiction articles to help them understand how “word choice conveys the central idea in scientific articles.” As a culminating task, students write an informative essay on how regeneration helps animals survive. In addition to these components, some plans list traits of the International Baccalaureate curriculum.
- Aligned to the International Baccalaureate curriculum, students read literature from different countries and cultures, examine different viewpoints, and compare them with their own. For example, a grade 11 unit plans for students to read *Drown*, a collection of short stories from the Dominican Republic by Junot Diaz. Students are asked to focus on a quote that drives the conflict and themes of the stories, analyze it, and then relate it to their own lives.
- In algebra, students are required to create systems of equations involving two variables from real life situations. One example is the cash box task which requires students to calculate the number of tickets sold for a dance for both singles and couples. Students are expected to generate equations, to provide two different solutions, and to justify their thinking in the context of the problem.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Teacher collaborations positively impact progress toward school goals and strengthen teachers' instructional capacity. Distributive leadership ensures that teachers have a voice in student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- In a teacher team meeting, teachers examined student diagnostic writing samples to answer the question, "How can we use guided questions to teach students to expand analysis of quotes to include sub-textual meanings?" A recorder for the team charted the criteria for the student work being examined such as the presence of a claim as well as length and quality of the writing sample. The teachers went through each student sample checking off whether or not the student had demonstrated evidence of the each skill. One of the observations they made was that students lacked the precision in language to be able to explain the quote being analyzed in the samples. This started a conversation about how to develop language. Teachers referenced an article they had read on how strategies for helping students develop inferences as a possible resource to help them develop clarity and depth of language when analyzing quotes.
- In a teacher meeting, teachers stated that one of the successful strategies that was being adopted by various teams was the idea of setting and tracking short-term goals. While teacher teams had always developed long-term goals, setting short-term goals allows them to monitor student progress more closely. Teachers stated that they develop more short-term goals connected to units of study in conferences with students. Teachers shared that these new practices have strengthened their pedagogy.
- Teachers determined they would involve students in project-based learning as a way of having them demonstrate what they know in ways that may not be captured in an essay. Teachers instituted courses of study that were more closely aligned to the International Baccalaureate philosophy of "Ways of Knowing." The principal empowered teachers to plan this new series of classes. As a result, the teachers developed a new curriculum of eight-day intensive course. Students explored many topics such as filmmaking, business startup, hydroponics and culinary arts. This series of intensive classes was well received by parents and students. It is now a part of the standard curriculum
- Teachers decided to celebrate student achievement and instituted a forum for student celebration called the Night of Champions.