



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Bronx Arena

High School X537

**1440 Story Avenue
Bronx
NY 10473**

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**Date of review: November 5, 2015
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The School Context

Bronx Arena is a transfer high school with 214 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 36% Black, 59% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 3% English Language Learners and 9% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 57.1%.

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	Well Developed
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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

All teachers are engaged in collaborative inquiry-based professional development teams. Distributive leadership structures afford teachers and teacher teams the opportunity to make key decisions about teaching and learning through the analysis and revision of curriculum and student work products.

Impact

The work, frequency, and variation of teacher teams provide all teachers with opportunities to engage in shared leadership and professional collaboration resulting in improved teacher capacity and student outcomes across the school community.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly to look at student work and data, using different protocols. In most meetings they use the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats, (SWOT), to determine next steps for students to succeed. During the Arena Team meeting observed, the team used a new rounds protocol, for a student that they share, to conduct inquiry on the student's work and data. The advisors also join these team meetings. Since all staff knows this student, they were able to contribute to the discussion relative to the work that he has produced, and as they know what is happening in his life speak to that as it is impacting the lack of achievement at this time. The combined feedback on generalizations, clarifying questions, and recommendations, produced next steps for each teacher when working with this student. Teachers stated that, "We target students who 'fear success' and are on the outside of the sphere of achievement, pulling them in so they achieve more and move toward college and career." Teachers stated that they are able to improve student mastery for these groups of students and "make my instructional practice more interdisciplinary". Further, teachers agree that their mutual respect and collegiality supports their professional growth as they learn best practices from each other.
- Distributed leadership is woven into the fabric of the school. Teachers create and lead professional development, the teacher teams, and create curriculum. Teachers collaborate on multiple teams, including the Arena Team, by subject, Progressive Redesign Opportunity Schools for Excellence (PROSE) team, Academic Mindset, Attendance, and Curricula Development Teams (CDT). Even if a teacher is not currently on the CDT, he/she also provides colleagues transparent feedback on curriculum design, as the courses are all taught simultaneously, or asynchronously, instead of in a defined chronology. Teachers and administration alike stated that being on the CDT is the best professional development as staff learns to create tasks that are aligned to the Common Core and the Regents and the school's 53 competencies, and create higher-order thinking questions and tasks that sequentially lead to each of the two challenges and capstone project.
- Teachers provide administration feedback through multiple surveys and an end-of-year reflection. This results in a level of transparency and collegiality that brings changes to meet teachers' needs. These changes occur in opportunities for professional learning, leadership, and professional growth. Teachers stated that their voices are integral to the school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, pedagogy is aligned to curricula and demonstrates shared schoolwide beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching practices reflect strategically provided multiple entry points and supports to curricula for all learners, but the deepening of discussions to further elevate levels of student thinking and extensions was not always evident.

Impact

The coherence of teacher beliefs supports all students to be engaged in cognitively challenging tasks across classrooms that are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and discussions at the team and school levels, demonstrating higher-order thinking skills in student work products. However, teacher implementation of discussion strategies and protocols illustrated missed opportunities for even higher-level reflective discourse amongst students.

Supporting Evidence

- The day is organized into two block periods where students attend subject-specific classes and then attend their Arena where subject teachers push-in to support. In all classes, students accessed their daily goals in a Tracker determining their classwork and tasks. Throughout the classes visited, the school-wide belief that students learn best with a student-centered curriculum, student choice, and students who drive their own education was evident. Students chose class objectives, decided on paper and pen or computer, and/or decided to work independently or in small groups. By deciding their daily objectives, students are in control of their own education and thus demonstrate independence while demonstrating higher-order thinking in their work products.
- In a United States history block class, students worked on different document-based questions. They had the choice to either write on the documents, or work on both a paper and a computer-based copy of the same documents. Students explained how they find answers in the documents, whether it is a dense small passage or larger passage, demonstrating a depth in the evidence and reasoning. The teacher moved from student to student supporting his/her learning. Similarly, in an earth science class, various groups worked on different labs simultaneously predicting future erosion of the Bronx River, working with mineral rocks, and completing a solutions lab. Throughout, students collaborated and called on the teacher for support as needed, while the teacher rotated from group-to-group, checking for understanding, answering questions, and asking probing questions to clarify or extend thinking. Some students used computers while others used lab composition books. In a math Integrated Co-Teaching class, students worked on different math courses, providing each the course needed toward graduation. One table was set-aside for seniors working on their senior projects, creating intricate games. At another table, a student presented his senior project on the physics of skateboarding, as he is graduating this week. In an English class, a student led a Socratic seminar on *Frankenstein* for her classmates.
- Since each lesson is scaffolded and/or extended for each student, each has access to the material. Students have opportunities to use manipulatives in their earth science labs. Yet, they did not have opportunities to have depth of discussion. In a science lesson on dependent and independent variables, a majority of the *Depth of Knowledge* questions was level one, and did not provide students sufficient opportunities for rigorous discussion. Nor was it evident that students had consistent opportunities to extend their learning.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school creates and adapts rich, cohesive curricula in all content areas that is consistently reflected upon and refined to address the needs of all learners and incorporates ever-increasing levels of rigor.

Impact

The school's commitment to analyzing student work and revising units of study to maximize coherency and to meet all student needs has resulted in a seamless educational experience for students that causes them to think deeply, make connections among and between subjects, prepare them for the next levels of their education, and promotes college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- As an original iZone school, administration and staff started with an off-the-shelf curriculum. Since then, the administrative and CDTs collaborate to create the school's curriculum, through a transparent vetting process whereby the staff submits praise, comments, and suggested changes using Google docs. To ensure that the curriculum is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, the instructional shifts, the New York State Standards, and the New York State Regents exams, the school determined 53 competencies, essential for all students to know and be able to do at a mastery level that are embedded across the curriculum, are tiered vertically, and spiral up in difficulty. Students speak to the competencies, including the ones they work on.
- As teachers have planned and refined curricula to meet student needs, they have determined that there is a need for individualized courses customized for student's needs. These individualized courses are tailored to meet student's needs based on data and student work. If a student is deficient in certain skills that are essential to complete a task within a challenge, then the curriculum development team, along with teachers, has created individualized tasks within a challenge. This includes both supports as well as extensions within the tasks. Each student works collaboratively with their teacher and counselor to devise their own curricular path towards graduation.
- Each credit that a student achieves includes two challenges and one capstone project, and within each of the two challenges, there are multiple tasks, as many as sixteen. Students are required to apply the skills and competencies mastered in each task within the two challenges to a final project. Additionally, student work and data are used to refine tasks to meet student's needs whether the student has language acquisition, special needs, struggling with a topic, or is hungry for a deeper application.
- Most student work is completed using a computer in this blended learning school, yet, some tasks involve labs, experiments, or projects, including hands-on activities with manipulatives and scientific materials. Some capstone projects involve creating intricate games for others to play, and must contain a board, pieces, cards, and complete set of rules.
- As each teacher has 25 students in a class who are working on different subjects asynchronously teachers create daily facilitation guides that are tailored to support each student to achieve the individualized self-created daily objectives that are posted on his/her Tracker page, and ensures teachers are knowledgeable of all courses.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across all classrooms, teachers and students use a variety of formative and summative assessments and checking for understanding practices aligned to the school's curricula that offers a broad picture of students' strengths and areas for growth. Teachers use common assessments and track student progress across grades and content areas.

Impact

All teachers use this information to provide students with meaningful actionable feedback, so all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities demonstrate increased mastery and teachers make informed decisions that impact student progress across all classrooms. Teachers adjust curricular and instructional decisions based on data to meet students' learning needs and students are aware of their next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Central to the school is the Competency Tracker, known to teachers, students, and parents, as the Tracker, an online tool. Each student's attendance, coursework, progress within each course, Regents, credits earned and those still needed, demonstrate a clear portrait of student mastery and progress toward graduation. Each student's Tracker page is colorized, showing task submitted, status of grading including rubric score, or awaiting grade. Students keep track of their tasks and know what needs to occur next, to go from where they are to completion of this challenge or the capstone project. Parents stated they sign in to their children's account, as the school does not yet have a parent portal, and track their children's progress, using it as a conversation tool to help support their children's work toward graduation. Student progress toward graduation is posted in each Arena.
- Using each facilitation guide, teachers are able to check for student understanding via multiple methods. For example, in one class a teacher conferenced with a student who was ready to discuss his senior project on light waves and the electromagnetic spectrum. The teacher asked clarifying questions to delve into the student's project plan and rubric creation, eliciting student-generated next steps and additional methods of analyzing data from an online Google survey. With another student, the teacher asked questions that helped the student delineate an area of confusion around writing the answer to a document-based question to compare and contrast two stories on theme and characterization. Another teacher had a small group of students, using white-board slates to determine independent and dependent variables, showing their answers and turning to a partner to discuss.
- To achieve credit for the task, challenge, or capstone, all students must reach mastery level, proficient 80%, or exemplary, above 90% on the rubric. Students continue to revise their work until attaining this level of mastery. Revision is engrained into the fabric of the school culture. The co-principals recalled how one student even jokingly named his drafts, "I know I'm getting better but will need to revise it. I know this is better but it is not yet final and you will make me revise it anyway. This is the final-final!" Each student receives actionable feedback from teachers in several ways, including written feedback on submitted tasks. A student stated and others agreed, that he gets written feedback from the teacher and verbal feedback during conferences. Students spoke to teacher feedback stating that it helped them to understand how to move forward and students said that they know their next steps and are able to complete those steps independently. Students agreed learning how to revise their own work will help them to succeed in college, as 94% of June 2015 graduates had Regents diplomas.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders communicate to staff and teachers engage in high-quality collaborative learning opportunities establishing a culture of professionalism and effectively communicate expectations of college and career readiness to families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact

The entire staff takes ownership of their professional growth demonstrating a culture of mutual accountability and partners with families, fostering their participation in support for their children's progress by providing ongoing feedback. Students own their educational experience, successfully achieve high expectations, and are prepared for the next level on a path to college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers set individual specific, measureable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals toward professional growth as aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* in the areas of questioning and using data. These goals are also tied to weekly professional development opportunities displayed in a yearly plan that is differentiated by the staff's needs as determined by a staff survey. Staff can also attend off-campus professional learning opportunities and turnkey their learnings to their colleagues. Since teachers co-teach almost every class, there is an embedded mutual accountability for student success and teachers collaborate professionally to gain additional pedagogical practices through intervisitations in different arenas, or groups of classes in which they do not currently teach. To ensure implementation of these new learnings, administration consistently observe classes to specifically look for new techniques, provide actionable feedback, and review and comment on the daily facilitation guides. This feedback is evident in teacher observations, both informal and formal as noted in *Advance*.
- To support student exploration of college and career opportunities, the college/career counselor and advocate counselors support students through an advisory curriculum that helps students to find their strengths and areas of career interest, and support students through college surveys and trips. Families attend workshops on the college application process, obtaining financial aid, scholarship applications, resume writing, and college fairs. Students spoke to meeting with the counselor who supports them in the process and in selecting colleges. Further, they stated that working with her has helped determine to which schools they are applying and receiving suitable support in the college essay, with the goal of making sure that the schools are a good fit. Students also spoke about their senior project, which helps them demonstrate their research and project skills.
- Students own their learning as evidenced by their creation of daily objectives, starting as a collaborative task with the teacher and advisor, which is then released over time until the student is self-sufficient. Daily objectives, posted in the Tracker, allow teachers to guide students and provide feedback toward their progress. A student stated, "The Tracker helps me to track my path toward graduation and I make sure I've passed my Regents."
- Parents stated they are highly pleased with the consistent communication with staff, which ensures their children receive what they need to graduate, whether it is about attendance or achievement. Parents agreed the Tracker helps them know where their children are succeeding or need help, the amount of credits earned, or additional needs to graduate.