Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists

Middle – High School X269

928 Simpson Street
Bronx
NY 10459

Principal: David J. Vazquez

Date of review: May 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek
The School Context

Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists is a middle - high school with 565 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 21% Black, 77% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% other students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88.0%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td></td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td></td>
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### Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

**Findings**

School leaders and staff communicate high expectations for all students while providing ongoing feedback and guidance support towards meeting those expectations. Administrators and teachers communicate expectations to families and provide feedback that informs them about their child's progress towards meeting those expectations.

**Impact**

Families understand expectations and their children's progress regarding college and career readiness. Students receive supports that prepare them for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Parents easily articulated the college and beyond vision the school holds for their children and praised the high level of ongoing communication they receive from the school regarding student progress. The school uses an online grading system that produces mid-cycle progress reports every 4-5 weeks to keep all stakeholders informed of student standing in each subject class across grades. In addition, many teachers record the academic progress students are making on a weekly or daily basis. Both students and their families have been trained to use this tool, enabling these stakeholders to check student progress frequently. Some parents even utilize an iPhone application to access this information. In addition, staff advisors call parents regularly to communicate student progress and areas of concern to ensure that all families can help their children meet expectations. Parents report that all advisors respond quickly to emails or text messages from them thereby strengthening efforts to keep students on a path to college and career readiness.

- The school's learning community was founded on the premise that every student is capable of attaining success in both college and the workplace. Advisory serves as the primary community-wide vehicle for transmitting the school's five core values of academic excellence, helping others, peacekeeping, creativity, and school spirit. All staff members serve as advisors and meet with their student advisees regularly to review their academic program and ongoing progress, to revisit their academic and personal goals, and to celebrate improvements and successes, thereby offering detailed feedback to prepare students for the next level. This system ensures that every student has an adult point person at the school who regularly advises them on a one-to-one basis to support their progress.

- To help students achieve high expectations, the school assembled an Attendance Team this year consisting of an administrator, an attendance teacher, and a community associate position to analyze data, identify trends, devise supports for chronically absent students, and disaggregate and circulate data by Advisory on a weekly basis. This team makes copious phone calls, solicits parent help through conferencing, and conducts frequent home visits to improve attendance. In addition, the team offers positive incentives to bolster student attendance such as advisory competitions, weekly raffles, and out-of-building lunch privileges. As a result of all of the structures listed above, attendance is at its highest level of 89.46%, suspensions have decreased as compared to last year, and parental participation has risen at conferences and school events.
Findings
Observations of teaching practice indicate an uneven application of questioning and instructional strategies to provide appropriately challenging and rigorous learning opportunities that promote high achievement.

Impact
The delivery of instruction inconsistently employs instructional strategies and questioning techniques outlined in curricula documents to provide entry points, participation, and discussions that engage all learners, hindering efforts to involve all students in high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence
- The school emphasizes the Danielson 3b component of using questioning to push student thinking and stimulate discussion. In some classes, this was observed. For example, in a 12th grade government class, students conducted a Socratic seminar based on the question, "Should affirmative action be eliminated?" defending their claims using textual evidence from the University of California versus Bakke case study. In another class, the teacher was observed asking clarifying questions to guide the work of students exploring the impact of a character's actions, however, when the students fell silent in apparent misunderstanding, the teacher answered the question herself and moved on without any further verbal exploration. In a special education class activity requiring students to identify strong word choice, the teacher agrees that the student's word choice is the best without probing or discussing why the word is the best choice. As a result, some students are exposed to teaching practices that do not consistently enable them to explain their thinking.

- Appropriate use of instructional strategies such as scaffolds utilizing illustrations, graphic organizers, leveled reading articles, leveled assignments and the use of calculators were effectively used by many teachers to engage students. Some class visits revealed the presence of multiple adults through Integrated Collaborative Team (ICT) teachers and student-assigned paraprofessional personnel. The majority of these classes conducted mini-lesson demonstrations with one teacher presenting while the other professionals floated around the room, however, in some classes not all students were able to engage in lesson tasks. For example, an English language arts class required students to work together to evaluate a classmate's text analysis response using a rubric to justify their scores utilizing both leveled work samples and leveled rubrics, however, some students were unable to articulate what they were doing in spite of the abundance of classroom personnel.

- Effective use of the "turn and talk" strategy for sharing ideas was observed in some classes. For example, a 10th grade ICT global studies class uses a "think-pair-share" activity to share their ideas about the positive and negative impacts of various technologies. However, in other classrooms teacher-centered direct instruction was prevalent during mini-lesson presentations causing verbal interactions to be mostly teacher to student and student to teacher.
### Additional Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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#### Findings

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects and for all students. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

#### Impact

The school continuously reviews and modifies curricula enabling all learners to have access to sequenced units of study with academic tasks designed to accelerate learning.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plans in all content areas reinforce higher order thinking and include differentiated materials and scaffolds to ensure that all learners can complete tasks. For example, a 6th grade social studies lesson on Greek mythology includes three different levels of myth reading passages assigned to emerging, baseline and high flyers student groups with writing prompts and assistive personnel assigned to facilitate discussions for each group. In addition, the lesson plan contains pre-meditated open-ended questions the teacher might use to push student thinking that help students apply this new knowledge to other studies conducted this year.

- Curriculum and end of unit tasks provide evidence that the school develops academic tasks utilizing backwards planning to challenge students through the adaptation of instructional materials on both the middle school and high school levels. The teachers use Expeditionary Learning, Connected Math, NYCDOE social studies and science scope and sequence in middle school and Regents expectations across high school content areas to build CCLS-aligned tasks that demand extended evidence-based, written responses. The school also continues to deepen alignment to the CCLS by integrating higher order Depth of Knowledge performance tasks in all curriculum units across disciplines in order to support students in making connections.

- The refinement of curriculum and instruction is an ongoing process that takes place during teacher team meetings. Teachers’ teams routinely look at student work and data with a focus on students’ ability to effectively summon evidence in written and verbal arguments. This year’s instructional focus was expanded to include a commitment to construct multiple entry points for students of all cognitive abilities, across all classrooms. For instance, an 11th grade ELA culminating task asks students to read a text and write a text-based response of 2 to 3 paragraphs, identifying a central idea in the text and analyzing how the author's use of one writing strategy develops this central idea in alignment with New York State Regents Common Core ELA expectations. Students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) receive a text analysis response form that asks for the same information utilizing bolded text that includes blank lines that students can fill in to help them organize their responses. As a result, a diversity of learners, including ELLs and SWDs, have access to the curricula and can effectively participate in complex culminating tasks.
Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment  Rating: Proficient

Findings
Curricula-aligned assessments and rubrics facilitate actionable feedback to students and teachers. Common assessments are used to monitor student progress and inform instructional and curricular adjustments.

Impact
Common assessments facilitate feedback and inform instructional adjustments.

Supporting Evidence
- Standards-aligned and Regents-aligned content rubrics are provided for students at the onset of each unit of study. Students stated that they regularly use these rubrics to guide them through the tasks and projects of each unit. Rubrics are attached to final products and teachers assess student work based upon rubric criteria and provide feedback to students. In addition, students receive procedural rubrics such as the "learning from my peers" group presentation rubric and the Socratic seminar participation rubric to provide clear expectations for participation.

- Common assessments used across classrooms and grades include MOSL baseline, mid-term and end-term assessments, CCLS-aligned Massachusetts State exams in ELA and math, end of unit performance tasks, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), and Fountas and Pinnell reading and i-Ready screening tools for special education students in the middle school up to the 9th grade. High school teachers create Regents mock exams across grades and subjects to determine student progress toward expected goals.

- Teachers stated that based upon analysis of student work and data, they adjust and supplement instructional materials to support student learning. For example, both school leaders and teacher team members state that data trends reveal that many students still struggle with the concepts of making claims and counterclaims. A high school English language arts department team discusses how to model a metacognitive think-aloud that crafts a claim using annotations and sentence stems to help students organize their thinking. In addition, the team decides to further adjust curricula and instruction by cutting down the size and complexity of the text by substituting lower-lexile vocabulary words and providing a glossary and footnotes for lowest third students.
### Findings
Teacher teams’ consistent practice of data and student work analysis typically results in enhancement of pedagogy and student progress. Distributed leadership structures support leadership development and teacher participation in decision-making.

### Impact
Teacher team work and distributed leadership structures support pedagogy and student progress.

### Supporting Evidence
- During a teacher team-meeting teachers utilized a tuning protocol to tune a lesson plan to meet the needs of special education and lowest third students. The protocol required the participation of the entire team in the roles of presenter(s), participants, facilitator and a timekeeper. As teachers analyzed presented problems, they shared analyses and made recommendations regarding the use of specific strategies to the presenting teachers. One teacher recorded notes from the meeting into a computer to memorialize their work for further discussion and reflection.

- During the meeting teachers identified an observed trend across classrooms regarding the fact that students lacked the ability to support their claims and arguments with textual evidence. They shared strategies to scaffold this skill, as they made reference to one of the school’s emphasized four thinking routines, close reading with annotations, routines adopted across the school to help students read, write, and speak critically.

- The school has many distributed leadership structures. Department chairpersons lead their respective teams in successive rounds of data analysis including frequent analysis of authentic student work and interim data generated from MOSL assessments. Grade team leaders are referred to as cluster coordinators and facilitate weekly grade team meetings that closely monitor student performance data to provide Advisors with timely data to be used during student intervention cycles. In addition, a faculty-led Advisory planning committee meets twice each month to ensure that college and work readiness, socio-emotional health, and leadership are key components of the grades 6-12 Advisory weekly curricula. As a result of these structures, teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in making important decisions that affect student learning across the school.