Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Bronx School of Law and Finance

High school 10X284

99 Terrace View Ave.
Bronx
NY 10463

Principal: Jessica Goring

Dates of Review:
May 16, 2017 - May 17, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Clarence Williams Jr.
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Bronx School of Law and Finance serves students in grade nine through grade twelve. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Rating</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

School leaders and staff articulate expectations to prepare students and families for college and careers. Teacher teams communicate high expectations for all students.

Impact

Families are informed and understand student progress through the engagement meetings and workshops. Guidance supports are in place to help all students understand high expectations and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates college and career readiness to families by initiating a college night. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information to parents regarding financial aid applications for college and the application process. Over seventy parents were present for this meeting. This was impactful as there are eighty seniors. Forty five will attend city university schools (CUNY), nine will attend state university schools (SUNY), and seven will go to private schools. During the parent interview, one parent stated, “The meeting helped me understand the process so that I can help my child make the right decisions based on what she is eligible for.”

- The guidance department consists of four guidance counselors. They are working with all seniors and juniors on College Access for All. The guidance counselors meet with the students individually and go into classrooms for college and career lectures. The counselors have stated that they have been successful in going into all classrooms this year. All students interviewed have stated that they have had sessions with the guidance counselors in their classroom. Grade nine students are involved in a course that started this year that is designed to train them to become successful high school students and how to be prepared for the next level including graduation requirements and high expectations.

- Teachers communicate high expectations to students regarding college and beyond. Every teacher has the college they attended posted on their door. Teachers have started a process this year that requires students to ask individual teachers during instruction to talk about the college they attended and why they attended it. Teachers are encouraged, based on their interest as a student, to suggest if their college would be the right fit for individual students and if their college would not be a good fit, to think and discuss with the students which college would they recommend.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy

Rating: Developing

Findings

Some classrooms are beginning to demonstrate practices that reflect how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and instructional shifts. Student work products and engagement reflected uneven levels of engagements across classrooms visited.

Impact

Classrooms reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation that result in meaningful work products however not all classes demonstrate student ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has stated that students learn best by being exposed to hands on activities, discussion, and repetition. In a grade eleven/twelve environmental science class, students were observed working on a guideline for writing abstracts for their journal entry to assist with their research paper. Writing was evident in the classroom as students were working individually on their own projects; however there were no hands on activity present to engage students in their particular topics that they were writing to. There were few opportunities for discussion except for questions by students. One student stated, “I need help, I’m still having trouble with a topic.”

- Discussion techniques were used in some classes visited. In a grade eleven/twelve statistics class, students were engaged in a discussion on providing statistical evidence on a stated claim. Students demonstrated ownership of their learning by choosing topics of their choice to compare statistical results; for example, one group of students chose gender and lateness to look if there is an association between the two. Students were in teams engaged in discussions on their various topics. One group was discussing choosing a topic. One member in the group stated, “We need a hypothesis that other students will be interested in.” Discussion and ownership on this level was not witnessed in most classes observed.

- During the observation of a grade ten global studies class, students were engaged in a lesson on apartheid. Students were engaged in the discussion. The teacher asked students questions that reflected social issues such as, “What does it mean to be segregated?” and “How did Apartheid effect people and what similarities can be drawn in the United States?” Students responded to the questions by answering, “Segregation means to separate groups based on categories”, and “The United States can be compared to Apartheid.” However, students did not take the discussion to additional steps; rather they just answered the teacher’s questions. Prompts were not given by the teacher to support ownership for the students and their learning.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders and faculty have ensured that curricula documents reflect instructional shifts, opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking, and alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards across grades and subject areas.

Impact

School leaders and faculty make purposeful curricula decisions that promote college and career readiness through rigor and is refined to promote coherence for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use curricula materials that demonstrate the use of the instructional shifts for literature. A unit plan on the novel *A Raisin in the Sun* demonstrated how students are required to write from sources to make an argument. The topic or theme of the unit was, Analyzing Raisin in the Sun through reading, discussion, and argument writing. Teachers included essential questions such as, “What is generally meant by the American Dream? What does it mean to you?” and “Are opportunities the same for blacks/whites/men/women, etc.? Explain.” Student tasks included students being able to engage in a Socratic seminar to support their argument. Their arguments were connected to the essential questions and encouraged students to engage in a literary analysis of the play.

- Across classrooms, curricula integrate the Common Core Learning Standards into the unit plans. A geometry unit demonstrated the Standards that are used for the unit and explained how they were to be incorporated into student learning to promote higher-order thinking. For example, Geometry students are required to derive the equation of a given center and radius using the Pythagorean Theorem. This reflects the Common Core Learning Standards for Geometry. Group assignments include working on Regents exam questions that reflect the Common Core Learning Standards.

- Units are refined to reflect the needs of all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, to promote rigor. Departments did an item skills analysis and identified common threads through all subjects to look at common areas that students were having difficulty with. The analysis showed students struggled in content and vocabulary, reading, and interpreting graphs and visuals. As a result, teachers incorporated using real world issues and using more graphs in curricula and lesson plans. An example was seen in social studies. After looking at the departmental analysis, it was evident that some students struggled with political cartoons. The social studies teachers expanded interpretation of political cartoons into the curriculum and allowed more time for students to reflect on this topic. Students also struggled with developing arguments and identifying the author’s purpose. The teacher team looked at how students could understand the text and identify the author purpose. The decision was made to extend the non-fiction and fiction text to allow students to spend more time on theme, analyzing text, and studying author's purpose.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings

Assessments in classrooms are inconsistent and do not always connect to the school’s curricula. In some classrooms, teachers utilize assessment practices, including rubrics, with varying levels of effective feedback.

Impact

Teachers provided limited feedback regarding student achievement in most classes observed and inconsistent assessments also led to students not receiving extensive feedback. Only some teachers were found to have made adjustments to instruction in order to support student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Actionable feedback to students through the use of rubrics was inconsistent across classrooms. A teacher provided feedback to a grade eleven student on an essay. The essay had been graded using a star with check marks on it, with no feedback or next steps to the student. Although the student received a twenty out of twenty, it was not clear what the twenty indicators were. On an English Language Arts essay on the book, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, the teacher scored the essay using a four point rubric in three areas, conflict type, capitalization/punctuation, and grammar/spelling. The student received one four and two threes. At the bottom of the rubric there is a section for additional teacher feedback. The teacher stated in this section, “Good work, you were amazing at identifying conflict. Next time, we will pay more attention to our punctuation.”

- Teachers assessed student work to provide feedback and adjust instruction; however this was not observed in most classes. During the observation of an advanced placement statistics class, the teacher was observed asking students questions such as, what do they have to do during the lesson. When the student responded, the teacher asked the entire class, “What mistake did she make in her explanation?” A student answered, “She used the word experiment, when it’s actually an observational study.” The teacher took the time to explain the connections between an experiment and an observational study, and how they are connected to a hypothesis. This level of checking for understanding and modifying the instruction was not consistent in other classes observed.

- The school leadership provided an analysis component and teacher reflection form to check for student understanding and provide feedback. The components included, a skill the student had acquired, what the student did not learn, instructional strategies, a new teaching approach based on data, and specific supports that are to be provided to small groups. An example provided by the principal included students struggled with context clues. New instructional practices included, teach different forms of context clues using the text and define vocabulary words. Although this form provided feedback and assessment to teachers, it was not utilized in most classrooms visited.
## Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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### Findings

School leaders provide support for the progress of teachers, including first year teachers, with effective feedback and next steps. Feedback accurately articulates strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

### Impact

Teacher support systems strengthen instructional practices and ensure the implementation of strategies that encourage professional growth and reflection. Feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practices.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership provides support for teachers through the use of observations. The principal observes every teacher in the building for the first round. The next rounds are done by department by the principal and assistant principals. An informal observation done on a teacher provided strengths and next steps for teachers. The administrator stated that the teacher was developing in all areas of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, under questioning and discussion techniques, the assistant principal stated, “The teacher’s questions led students to a single path of inquiry; questions only solicited a short response.” Follow up next steps included having the teacher use questioning and discussion techniques to deepen understanding, and for the teacher to use divergent and convergent questioning throughout the lesson. The administrator also stated that there will be a follow-up observation to monitor the progress of the actionable feedback.

- The principal provides professional development to new teachers to acclimate them into the school learning community. Topics include citywide expectations, introduction to the school year, and student engagement. This was impactful, during a teacher meeting, teachers have stated that student engagement was a schoolwide focus for all staff. They further stated that the school year starts with new teacher training and continues with professional development throughout the year, and mentoring with all new teachers partnering with a mentor. A letter went out to mentors and first year teachers in August stating that all first year teachers are required to have a mentor. Teachers new to the profession are required to keep learning logs. The mentors observe first year teachers in the classroom, assist with lesson plans, and help first year teachers adjust to organization and administrative structures within the school setting.

- All teachers are observed throughout the course of the school year. An informal observation conducted in May demonstrated next steps for a veteran teacher to reflect areas that the teacher needs to improve on to promote the schoolwide instructional practices. The administrator stated that the teacher must use text connected with the aim and incorporate student choices with the activities. The teacher must also use formative assessments as data to drive and modify instruction, and should be reflected in the follow up lesson.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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</table>

Findings

Most teachers participate in organized teacher collaborations that are not always aligned to the school goals. The school community is developing systems to promote school leadership.

Impact

Teacher team meetings are beginning to focus of developing teacher practices. Distributive leadership practices are beginning to demonstrate how teachers have voices in making key decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaborate to support schoolwide learning initiatives; however this was not witnessed consistently across classrooms. During a science team observation, teachers took turns looking at student work and provided each other with feedback. They read the work first then shared out what they noticed. For example, by looking at the diagrams, they noticed that students were representing the right types of beaks on finches, they wondered: at what stage in the sequence of understanding were students at. They suggested looking at prior lessons to see where remediation is needed. Next steps included having students lead the discussion on how they came up with the right answer. One teacher suggested that they would expand some questions to be part of the review, and incorporate higher order thinking questions into lessons. Although teachers look at student work to drive instruction, teacher practices to engage students are a schoolwide practice that was supported in this meeting, this was not evident in other teacher minutes and student engagement was not clear as a result of classroom visits.

- An English Language Arts department meeting agenda from showed that the team planned to look at January Regents exam scores and work from individual teachers to support instruction. Scores and student work was discussed in the notes taken however, the notes did not reflect teacher practices based on student errors or concerns. Notes included, discussing connections between lesson plans, student work, and unit plans. The next steps of the meeting included a close review of selected student work, and key instructional areas to re-teach to improve next January Regents exam scores.

- There were some examples of distributive leadership evident, with teachers stating that the use of Plickers, an electronic instant feedback tool used with a smartphone to determine next instructional steps, was an instructional initiative that was incorporated into the school curricula by teachers. Although school leadership confirmed that the initiative was started by teachers, it was not evident in any most classrooms visited. The science team has increased their meeting schedule because they were not pleased with the Regents exam scores; as a result they chose to meet more often than other teams.