Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Bronx Writing Academy
Middle 09X323
270 East 167th St.
Bronx
NY 10456

Principal: Lauren Hasson

Dates of Review:
February 1, 2017 - February 2, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Jorge Estrella
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 Writing Academy serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. 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

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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 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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>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>
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<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>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>
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<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings
Structures in place allow faculty members to engage in meaningful daily meetings in small grade teams ensuring that teachers’ professional responsibilities are aligned with the school’s instructional goals and allocate time for teachers to provide interventions for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, in small group settings.

Impact
The strategic design of the school’s master schedule and the small grade team structure consistently promote high levels of collaboration among school staff to increase college and career readiness that is resulting in improved instruction and student outcomes by targeting their needs and strengths in small group settings.

Supporting Evidence
Strategic decisions were made to maximize staff time via the design of the school’s master schedule that promote collaboration and focus teacher time on instructional work. For example, teachers from each grade are organized into two small teams that include all four core content teachers who teach the same students. Small grade teams meet together three times per week to discuss needs of their shared students and meet with students’ parents as a cohesive body. In addition, teams meet twice per week to engage in teacher rounds and analysis of student work.

- The strategic approach for scheduling puts daily sessions in place to address the individual learning needs of students. The school uses iReady as a platform to personalize and individualize instruction. During the school-wide daily intervention block, teachers pull small groups and provide targeted intervention and support to students. During small grade team meetings, this data is discussed and analyzed resulting in a change in groups or further intervention. School leaders attend these small grade team meetings in order to monitor progress and gauge progress towards action plans from the schoolwide intervention block. As a result, there is a 12 percent increase in ELA and a 14 percent increase in math from September to February using the iReady assessments.

- The school uses the Summit Basecamp to promote mutual accountability among teachers and students. This is a blended learning platform that houses all student work products, aligned to standards, including student projects and personalized learning portfolio. This program offers opportunities to students to work on projects during regular instruction time, once they finish their tasks, students have one-on-one conference with the teacher, who assigned the task. Students submit their work through GoogleDocs and receive feedback from the teacher each step of the way. Students have multiple opportunities to improve their work and are guided through teacher feedback. Projects are assessed on 21st century skills called cognitive skills. These are skills that students need in order to be successful in high school, college, and careers. Skills included, inquiry, analysis, using sources, and defending arguments. Students work at their own pace and make choices regarding which types of activities will support their learning and as a result increases student engagement.

- During the meeting with students, they shared that having a period a day that allows them to work at their own pace and more opportunities to interact with teachers, helps them address their needs and in some cases, offers them guidance and extensions to more challenging academic tasks.
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies and instructional tasks do not consistently engage students in rigorous work and discussions that promote student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teacher-dominated lessons do not offer students opportunities to participate in high-level discussions and to make their thinking visible in order to demonstrate critical and analytical thinking in work products across all subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- In some classrooms visited, tasks and lessons facilitated student participation and promoted student-to-student conversations and student-generated questions. For example, in a sixth grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) science class, the teacher engaged students by using questions that lead to high level peer-to-peer discussion as students worked in groups. They explored different real world connections involving “procedures to build structures” and used protocols to engage in group discussions. A similar practice was noted in a grade eight English Language Arts (ELA) class where a lesson on “academic discussion of child labor in response to a text” evolved into a student-led discussion, as students worked in groups using group discussion protocols and graphic organizers. In both classrooms, students were able to make connections to current events and real word applications. However, this high level of student engagement in discussions and understanding of connections to real world applications is yet to be implemented in most classrooms. Furthermore, in a grade six math class, although students were in groups, the teacher directed lesson did not provide an opportunity for student to student discussion and students were unable to make real word connections to the math activity.

- Provisions for multiple entry points to learning was evident in some classrooms. For example, a grade six English as a New Language (ENL) lesson about the use of vocabulary related to weather, had a group of students using graphic organizers, a second group was receiving guided instruction, and another group of students were using laptops working on Power Point presentations. However, a fourth group did not receive attention from the teacher and students were engaged in topics unrelated to the lesson. Furthermore, one student was working on an online activity that was not related to the learning target of the lesson, thus lowering the rigor of the lesson.

- Some lessons did not fully incorporate student extensions to maximize learning and further engage students in topics that fully capture their interest. During the student meeting, some students stated that when they finish assigned tasks before their classmates, they complete missing work from prior assignments or read a book while peers complete their work. Only a few mentioned that the teacher offered challenging tasks to further their learning.

- Conversations with students indicate that they work in flexible groups and use rubrics and graphic organizers with challenging tasks. During classroom visits, some teachers provided multiple entry points to engage all students in challenging tasks. For example, in a seventh grade ELA class students were in tiered grouping, engaged in turn-and-talk sessions, group discussions, self-assessing tasks, and using graphic organizers. However, the inconsistent use of multiple entry points has yet to promote student engagement so that all students showed mastery of the learning objectives and standards. This was evident at the end of the lesson when students were sharing their learning and only a few students were able to make their thinking visible and most of the ELLs and students with disabilities did not have an opportunity to participate.
### Findings

Across content areas, curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (Common Core) and supported with the inclusion of real-world connections and academic tasks that emphasize higher-order thinking skills.

### Impact

Across content areas, all students benefit from Common Core Learning Standards aligned curricula. Across grades, instructional plans emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- **The school’s curriculum is aligned to the Common Core.** Scholastic’s Code X for ELA, EngageNY for mathematics, Passport for social studies and New York State Scope and Sequence for science. School leaders have strategically identified professional learning opportunities for faculty members that assist in building curricular coherence across grades. For example, at the beginning of the school year the social studies teacher team attended the social studies Passport curriculum workshop. Lead teachers in science and assistant principals attended Urban Advantage sessions that helped in unpacking the Common Core Standards. In addition, the school participated in New York City Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund which provides a peer instructional coach to support teachers in deepening their work in lesson planning and strengthening differentiated and tiered tasks. These resources support the school in ensuring that planned curricula emphasize cognitively demanding tasks. Decisions to build coherence are evident in the alignment of curricula maps and unit plans. For example, across content areas curriculum maps and unit plans demonstrate essential questions with real-world connections. School Leaders and faculty have adapted the curricula to meet student needs and have adjusted the unit plans based on student data and student work.

- **Lesson plans revealed that teachers plan differentiated tasks for identified students.** For example, an ELA lesson plan identifies independent practice for students who are on, below, and above grade level. Lesson plans include the use of audiovisuals, graphic organizers and sentence starters to address the needs of ELLs and students with disabilities. The lesson plan objective, “Analyze how the author’s tone supports their perspective of a topic” included three differentiated tasks for identified students. One task was for students to read the entire poem “Democracy” and explain how the tone supports the author’s perspective of democracy. A second task required students to analyze a section of that poem, complete a graphic organizer, have discussions, then use sentence frames to support them as they write their short response. A third task requires guided practice and support from the teacher using multiple entry points to analyze the poem.

- **Teachers adapted a curriculum where instructional plans include challenging work and support for all students including ELLs and students with disabilities.** Across classrooms, curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills. Unit plans reflect assignments that require students to engage in complex tasks. Evidence of this was a sixth grade unit task that requires learners to “write a procedure for building a structure” or analyze text around the 2016 presidential elections.

- **School leaders created a professional development plan informed by a teacher survey, student outcomes, initial planning conferences, and Advance data.** The professional learning activities centered on the promotion of higher-order thinking skills across all grades and subjects via questioning in order to increase student cognitive engagement. For example, the principal led a workshop entitled, Make the Thinking Visible, for teachers to promote visible thinking and higher-order thinking skills in their unit and lesson plans.
Additional Finding

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

Across the school, teachers align assessments to curricula and use rubrics to constantly provide students with actionable feedback. Common assessments are used to track student progress, and to make curricula and instructional adjustments.

Impact

Teachers provide students with actionable feedback that students use to improve their work. Teachers use student assessment data that result in adjustments in curricula and instruction that target student needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and students spoke about using rubrics in every subject, and how using rubrics helps them get a better grade. Students also demonstrated familiarity with actionable feedback and understood the next steps to improve their assignments. For example, bulletin boards outside and inside classrooms evidenced the use of rubrics and actionable feedback with next steps. Students also stated that they go online to look at their performance data from *iReady*, for ELA and math. Grade six students use the Summit Based Camp platform for all subjects and have online access to feedback and next steps in student-friendly language from teachers. Evidence of feedback included, "Great explanation and inference presented, you were able to effectively and succinctly explain how each of the idioms support Langston Hughes' perspective of democracy. Next step, make a connection of how this is shown in our current society (real word connection)." As a result of these teaching practices, students are aware of their next steps in meeting their learning targets.

- The school uses a variety of common assessments determined by Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) selections, interim assessments, mid-unit checks, and teacher-created performance tasks. State data was shared with the faculty across content and at faculty conferences to highlight areas where students were close to meeting State targets. Those students are targeted for additional support to increase the number of students meeting performance standards. Recent data has revealed that teachers need to focus on the instructional shifts of academic language, citing evidence, and deep conceptual understanding of core math concepts. This instructional challenge was shared in inquiry teams and lessons were geared to support students with this skill. Based on data results, teachers now include more time for strategy groups, Response to Intervention (RTI), peer-to-peer discussions, one-to-one conferencing, and project-based work by making adjustments to their daily ELA and math double blocks of time.

- Teachers across grades and content areas use a wide range of assessment tools such as rubrics, checklists, and pre- and post-unit assessments. Results are used to monitor and track student’s progress towards grade level goals. For example, a review of instructional planning documents revealed that most teachers create groups of students for academic intervention services based on the results of common assessments.

- Small grade teams use Mastery Connect, a comprehensive system of data analysis allowing school leaders and teachers to use assessment data effectively to guide lesson planning and provide support to all students.
Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations to students and families connected to college and career readiness and offer ongoing feedback and next steps. Family engagement structures support parents’ better understanding of their children’s progress.

Impact

Multiple venues of communication and on-going feedback and guidance used by school staff results in supports for families to help them understand their child’s progress towards college and career readiness. Students are receiving support and guidance along with preparation for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff communicate with families through monthly calendars, weekly activities, phone calls, and student progress reports. In addition, families have access to online platforms which keep them informed of their children’s progress and school events. Thus, promoting meaningful conversations with teachers as well as allowing for early detection of struggling students that result in the development of collaborative plans to help the student at school and at home. Furthermore, the school offers open school night, parent-teacher conferences, weekly small grade teams sessions with parents, one-on-one sessions with teachers or other staff members, schoolwide events, awards ceremonies, and monthly breakfasts with the principal. Parents indicated that teachers use an on-line grading system to communicate their child’s academic and socioemotional progress.

- The school’s guidance counselor is diligent and persistent in communicating with families regarding requirements for high school applications through workshops, high school fairs, and individual conferences. Students expressed enthusiasm regarding the high school fair and the positive impact it was having in the school community. Student’s spoke proudly of applying to high school and feeling prepared for the next step in their education. In addition, there are sixty grade eight students enrolled in Regents Algebra I classes and specialized high school classes for grade seven students which are scheduled to start in spring of 2017. As indicated in the 2015-2016 School Quality Snapshot, 85 percent of this school's former eighth graders earned enough high school credit in 9th grade to be on track for graduation, which is higher than the district average.

- The school uses multiple approaches to communicate high expectations to students, such as the students’ handbook, online grading system, and the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). This program provides students and classes with incentives and rewards for preparation, excellence, never giving up, integrity, neatness, and kindness. During classes visited, students and classes received Bronx Writing Academy (BWA) Bucks for positive behavior that supported learning in the classroom. Students also shared how the PBIS values helps them stay focused on behavioral and academic expectations and what they need to do to do well in class. A student stated, “The implementation of the PBIS has helped calm the school and minimize classroom disruptions” Another student added that, “The teachers make sure we learn all necessary content and study skills to be ready for high school.”

- Students reported that in addition to the regular instructional support they receive in classrooms, they also have opportunities during their lunchtime for small group instruction with their teachers. As indicated in the 2015-2016 School Quality Snapshot, students have an 83 percent passing rate in their math, English, social studies, and science classes. Furthermore, comparing the New York State English tests from 2015 to 2016, the school has increased five percent in meeting state standards, which puts the school at two percent higher than its comparison group in the State English test.
## Additional Finding

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<thead>
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<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

### Findings

All teachers are organized in small grade teams to engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations where they consistently analyze student work, as well as formative and common assessment data, towards meeting schoolwide goals and implementing the Common Core and the instructional shifts.

### Impact

Teacher team collaborations engage teachers in discussing best pedagogical practices and making targeted curricula refinements to address the academic needs of their students.

### Supporting Evidence

- All teachers are scheduled for daily common planning sessions by departments and small grade teams where they engage in collaborative inquiry activities. During these sessions, teachers are responsible for adapting and revising curriculum with a focus on improving student engagement. Teachers have done this by creating multiple points of entry, including student choice, real world connections, and developing student centered instruction. During these professional collaborations, discussions center on refining delivery and other instructional practices to support the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core and instructional shifts.

- During teacher team meetings, teachers are required to discuss and document how teacher team work promotes the school’s instructional focus and what supports are needed to continue student progress. The school has implemented two strategies for teacher team professional collaborations. In their twice weekly meetings, departments engage in Teacher Rounds and analysis of student work. Teacher Rounds is a schoolwide practice that gives teachers the opportunity to identify a problem of practice related to the instructional core in vertical teams, take steps to collaboratively plan and address the problem of practice, share practices through inter-visitations, and make commitments to their own practice which foster cohesive instruction. A review of teacher team agendas and plans reveal that during professional collaborations, teachers align teacher team work to the school’s instructional focus. Furthermore, during small grade team meetings, iReady and Interim Assessment data is discussed and analyzed resulting in a change in student groups or additional forms of intervention. School leaders also attend teacher small grade team meetings and monitor progress in iReady consistently by discussing data and action plans during the schoolwide intervention block of time. As a result, the school’s strategic teacher team approach creates a common language across the school and is enhancing the instructional capacity of teachers by facilitating their own learning and refining their instructional practices.

- During the meetings with teachers, they shared that because of the multiple opportunities to be involved in professional collaborations, they now have a deeper understanding of the demands of the curricula, a better understanding of student progress, and their own teaching practice. Teachers also indicated that the collaboration goes beyond the meetings as all agendas and action plans are posted in GoogleDocs which allows them access to team meeting documents.

- During the ELA team meeting, teachers looked at a sample of student writing work. The teachers discussed several strategies which included using sentence starters, implementing a strategic approach for vocabulary development, providing graphic organizers, using more exemplars, and identifying scaffolds to engage students with supports and extensions to help them understand how to cite textual evidence. At the end of the meeting, the teachers agreed to try these strategies and will report back the outcomes of these modifications at the next ELA meeting.