Quality Review Report

2016-2017

The Bronx School of Young Leaders
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 10X331
40 West Tremont Ave.
Bronx
NY 10453

Principal: Serapha Cruz

Dates of Review:
April 6, 2017 - April 7, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Lenneen Gibson
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

The Bronx School of Young Leaders 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

<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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults

**Area of Celebration**

- Well Developed

3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations

**Additional Finding**

- Well Developed

### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Additional Finding**

- Well Developed

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

**Additional Finding**

- Proficient

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

**Additional Finding**

- Proficient

4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning

**Additional Finding**

- Well Developed

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

**Additional Finding**

- Proficient
Findings

The implementation of a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) program, student assemblies, student council, and success mentors supports the school’s approach to building a safe and inclusive school culture.

Impact

A safe and inclusive school culture focused on attendance and youth development ensures that all students are known well and fosters meaningful student voice, while supporting the academic and personal growth of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a variety of supports in place such as, a PBIS program, an advisory program, Super Scholars (students lauded for their academic excellence), and a student council, resulting in a safe and inclusive school culture where student voice is welcomed and valued. The PBIS program, known as PRIDE (Professionalism, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Empathy), is built on the tenets of character development that support the development of resilience and persistence as well as other habits that contribute to future success. During a daily advisory program, students focus on one of the facets of PRIDE. Students are rewarded with PRIDE Bucks through a positive behavior reward system. This year, students practiced empathy through their involvement in a toy drive for a women’s shelter, as well as sock and food drives. The Super Scholars program was developed by students to celebrate peers who maintain an 85 percent or higher average in five or more classes and have perfect attendance. Students of the month are celebrated through student assemblies. At the start of each school year, the student council has a voice in selecting the supplies that all students receive. Students have a voice in uniform selection, planning cultural events, pep rallies, and school dances, and in fundraising activities. The student council also meets with the wellness council to provide better food choices. In addition, there is schoolwide anti-bullying campaign during Respect for All Week. As a result of these practices, principal suspensions have been reduced from 24 in 2015-2016 to 20 in 2016-2017.

- The student intervention team, comprised of the administration, teachers, and social-emotional personnel, meets weekly to discuss chronically absent and at-risk students in need of intervention. During a student intervention team meeting, specific cases of students were reviewed, and new interventions were implemented (such as the assigning of individual, group, or at-risk counseling or paraprofessional support), and parental involvement strategies were reviewed for efficacy. In each of these cases, the team generated next steps. The team shared that these practices have resulted in students being removed from the chronically absent list, the overall school attendance rate, which for the past four years has hovered between 93 and 94 percent, has risen to 95 percent.

- The school has implemented the Success Mentor program that partners with AmeriCorps to target chronically absent students by working with the families as well as additional community based organizations. The Success Mentor program pairs students with an adult, as well as a peer, who serve as accountability partners to ensure that students are known well and attending school regularly. Teachers monitor student attendance and update the administration regularly as well as make recommendations for the removal of students from the chronically absent list when attendance improves. As a result of this initiative, twenty-six students were removed from the list.
<p><strong>Area of Focus</strong></p>

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

**Findings**

Teachers use varied methods to check for understanding and provide opportunities for student self-assessment. Teachers use rubrics aligned to the school’s curricula and provide feedback to students.

**Impact**

Teachers consistently check for understanding and actionable feedback to students; however, the checks for understanding do not always lead to on-the-spot adjustments to the lesson or make students aware of their next learning steps. The feedback to students does not offer a clear portrait of student progress limiting opportunities for some students to demonstrate increased mastery.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers check for understanding through the use of hand signals and questioning. In a mathematics class for diverse learners, students were working on a transformation and reflection problem set. The teacher explained the goal of the assignment; afterwards, the teacher asked the students to hold up one to four fingers to show their comfort level with completing the assignment. The majority of the students held up three fingers, and those that didn’t received one-to-one support from the teacher. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, the teacher checked for understanding by conferencing with the students and posing questions. Furthermore, the teacher continued to check for understanding by asking a question related to the students' understanding of the learning target. The majority of the students held up three fingers. The teacher probed the students who held up three fingers and the students stated that they had issues with some of the vocabulary. Students were also observed using a Rate my Reading rubric, which was an adapted State two-point short response rubric. Checks for understanding were observed across classrooms visited.

- Across classrooms, teachers use varied methods to consistently check for understanding, however, effective on-the-spot adjustments were not evident in all classrooms. In a mathematics class, the teacher checked for understanding by using sign language. A student was explaining a misconception encountered when finding the area of a triangle and students signed, “I agree.” Furthermore, when a student went to the board to demonstrate the process of solving a problem, students, without prompting, took the opportunity to adjust their own work. Similarly, in an ELA class, students were observed signing, “I agree.” The teacher checked for understanding by asking, “What type of figurative language is that?” and “What did you say the tone was?” In another ELA class, the checks for understanding included conferencing with students and asking questions such as, “Where is your claim?” However, instances of on-the-spot adjustments to meet the needs of all learners were not observed in every lesson, leaving open the possibility that not all learners were aware of their next learning steps. In the student meeting, students stated that they do not always use rubrics but they do have opportunities to self-assess.

- Teachers create customized rubrics for assignments and use the Teachers College Writing Progressions rubric to provide feedback to students on their writing. Teacher feedback on a sample of student writing commended the student for grade appropriate grammar and sentence structure. The next steps required the student to revise the introduction to the essay to establish a claim with reasoning. A different piece of student work showed one student providing feedback to another student on a character analysis essay. A review of student work shows evidence that teachers and students provide feedback on student work. Although feedback was actionable, it does not yet provide a clear portrait of student progress so that students can make meaning across content areas.
Findings
School curricula align to Common Core Learning Standards and reflect the schoolwide curricular planning process. Units, lessons, and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
The integration of the instructional shifts and the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) across grades and content areas results in coherence that promotes college and career readiness for all students. All students have access to the curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging.

Supporting Evidence
- The school utilizes the Understanding by Design approach to curriculum planning and has adopted Common Core aligned curricula across content areas, such as, Teachers College Writing Progressions and Expeditionary Learning for writing and English Language Arts (ELA), National Geographic World Cultures and Geography, Read Like a Historian for social studies, and EngageNY for mathematics. Furthermore, unit plans are entered on the ATLAS Rubicon platform to be reviewed and ensure they are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.

- Curricular documents across content areas strategically integrate the instructional shifts of citing textual evidence to support claims and reasons, as well as, writing arguments based on discipline-specific content. Furthermore, lesson plans across grades and subject areas coherently demonstrate a school-adopted curricular planning strategy that includes goal setting for learners, accessing prior knowledge, acquiring new information, applying knowledge, and generalizing or summarizing knowledge learned (GANAG). For example, a sixth-grade science unit asks students to produce a severe weather poster and requires them to cite textual evidence related to their research on severe weather conditions, as well as, present a scientific basis for the conditions. A sixth-grade ELA unit plan requires students to produce an argumentative writing piece in which they state a claim and support it with evidence. Likewise, an eighth-grade unit plan requires students to cite textual evidence to support a claim about gun control, based on the question, “What should gun control look like?” Across grades and subjects, Students engage in cognitively engaging tasks on topics of high interest.

- Unit plans and academic tasks are crafted and refined using data from student work as well as other formative data collected during instruction. A mathematics unit plan shows modifications such as a change in the scope and sequence of topics so that the topics of transformations and geometry were combined and the functions lesson was the last topic covered. The rationale for this change was to support students as they prepared for the New York State exams and to draw a connection between the concepts and build on prior knowledge. A social studies unit plan shows modifications made by adding an academic task to a Civil War unit. The task required students to arrange a dinner party for major figures of the Civil War. The addition of this task plans for a more creative and engaging activity that allows students to apply the required skills of the unit. Teacher revisions were observed across unit plans reviewed.

- Across subjects, lesson plans include modifications for diverse learners. A math lesson differentiates student groupings based on data from checks for understanding and student self-assessment. This lesson planned for small group instruction for students who did not meet the learning target. An ELA lesson plan also differentiates for diverse learners. This lesson incorporates poems based on the students’ assessed reading levels. Another mathematics lesson differentiates for diverse learners based on individual student learning goals to ensure that all learners are cognitively engaged.
### Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices and student discussions are aligned to the curricula and reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best, with a focus on collaboration, peer learning, and reflection.

#### Impact

Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation, informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* as well as the instructional shifts.

#### Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus states, “If we expect students to monitor their own learning, then we will require clear criteria for assessing their understanding.” In a science class, the learning objective required students to determine the probability of compound events using tree diagrams. Students were working on a probability problem set facilitated by a fellow student. In this class, a student went up to the board to demonstrate his work on a probability problem. The student facilitating the lesson monitored student learning by asking the class, “Can someone summarize what _____ did?” “Who wants to add on?” “Did anyone use a different strategy?” and “Does anyone not understand how she got four reds?” Students were responding directly to one another as they reviewed the student’s work. In a mathematics class, the learning objective required students to simplify expressions using the distributive property and combine like terms. In this station activity, student leaders with strong aptitudes for problem solving were placed at each station to support group members’ problem-solving processes and monitor their own learning as well as that of the peers.

- Student discussions across classrooms reflect high levels of student thinking and participation. For example, in an ELA class with diverse leaners, students analyzed the poems “Cody” and “Look” with attention to symbol, imagery, figurative language, tone, and theme (SIFTT) and then conducted a fishbowl activity. Students in the fishbowl had designated roles such as questioner, clarifier, reader, and summarizer. In the fishbowl, the questioner posed the following question, “How does the first paragraph connect Cody to himself?” After the fishbowl activity, students were heard giving each other positive feedback. In a science class, students engaged in a turn and talk activity related to the ways in which plants and animals engage in reproduction. Student discussions ensued and students recounted that plants reproduce asexually and animals reproduce sexually. In an ELA class, students were analyzing evidence from the text *Unbroken*. Students engaged in a turn and talk about the main character by citing evidence from the text.

- In most classes visited, teachers provided opportunities for high-level student discussion. In a mathematics class, the teacher organized a think-pair-share activity in which students addressed the prompt, “How can we find the area of the triangle?” Students responded directly to one another by explaining their process and demonstrating their thinking by showing their work on the board. In a social studies class where students were working independently on a document-based activity, students were not provided an opportunity to engage in student-to-student discussions, leading to missed opportunities for students to share in the thinking of their peers. Overall, classrooms visited reflected high levels of thinking and participation.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

School leaders and staff members effectively communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness and partner with families in a wide range of ways including programs such as the Academic Parent Teacher Team. The school community establishes a culture for learning that systematically communicates high expectations to students, including recognizing achievement.

Impact

The school offers both academic and non-academic supports to students in meeting high expectations connected to college and career readiness. The school has established a culture for learning that provides guidance and feedback so that all students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Staff members implement effective strategies for communicating high expectations about college and career readiness and partner with families to ensure students meet those expectations. Parents are apprised of their children's academic progress through report cards, progress reports, weekly parent engagement meetings, back to school curriculum night, online portals, emails, text messages, monthly calendars of school events, and phone calls. During the parent meetings, parents mentioned receiving daily section sheets that track their children's behavior, as well as, academic performance in all classes. As an alternative to parent-teacher conferences, student-led conferences are conducted and provide students with an opportunity to discuss their portfolio of work in the presence of their parents. Parents are also invited to celebratory events that laud students for their academic achievements.

- The school provides ongoing events and creates opportunities to partner with and engage families in supporting their children's learning experiences that are connected to college and career readiness. The school provides workshops for parents on navigating the online portals and hosts health and wellness workshops for the parents, as well as, art classes on the weekend. Parents also had the opportunity to attend a math night at the school to support their children in solving math problems. In addition, the school partners with families through the Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) initiative. Teachers collaborate with families, providing them with vocabulary resources, including training on how to engage their children in vocabulary-related activities outside of the classroom. Teachers administered an academic vocabulary diagnostic to APTT parents and students during the first meetings. At the second meeting, a follow up diagnostic was administered to families. Students in all grades demonstrated improvement in vocabulary based on the pre- and post-assessments. Parents were also surveyed for their input on this and other programs that the school can provide.

- Teachers and staff have set systematic structures that communicate high expectations for all learners and provide supports to ensure students are prepared for the next level. The high school articulation process begins in the sixth grade by having students complete an interest inventory. Guidance counselors push-in to classes and inform the students about the process to apply for high school. Students also visit high schools of their interest and attend off and on-site high school fairs. Moreover, there are career fairs and college awareness activities held at the school, and students with disabilities take a vocational assessment. Extended time learning provides enrichment for students in need, and partnerships with community based organizations offer students learning experiences such as study skill workshops, prep classes for the specialized high school exams, and college preparatory programs. Eighty-four percent of former eighth grade students have earned enough high-school credit in the ninth grade to be on track for graduation.
**Additional Finding**

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

**Findings**

Teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured collaborations in their professional learning communities. Grade leaders exemplify distributive leadership practices that are embedded in the school.

**Impact**

Professional learning communities strengthen teacher instructional capacity, resulting in coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Grade leaders have an integral voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A mathematics team was observed analyzing student work on a geometry assessment. Students were required to generate their own conceptual geometry formula for perimeter and area. Teachers used a prescribed protocol to analyze student work, noting trends and patterns in the work such as students devising their own strategies as well as addressing common student misconceptions. Teachers decided to modify this task by including the use of manipulatives, having students be more mindful of their use of academic vocabulary, and asking students to explain their thinking using a quick write. As a result of the mathematics team engaging in a six-week inquiry cycle during common planning time, teachers stated that instructional practices are no longer isolated, there is greater instructional coherence in the subject, and students’ mathematical fluency is increasing. Furthermore, teachers are aware of each other’s strategies and are building on their colleagues’ work. Additionally, strong units of study that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards resulting in schoolwide instructional coherence were developed. ELA iReady data showed the average score for seventh grade students rose ten percentage points when compared to the previous school year’s results. Additionally, iReady mathematics data for intervention groups also showed some significant gains.

- As a professional learning community, teachers are revising curriculum, looking at power standards, and creating rubrics. The school’s curricula underwent a review by the American Institute for Research to evaluate its alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards. Based on the results of the report, the curricula showed alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards, however, teachers on grade teams still made revisions to the curricula to align to school goals. Following the report’s recommendations, the sixth grade curriculum maps on literacy, science, and social studies were revised during a six-week inquiry cycle. Similarly, a sixth grade writing rubric was created that can be adapted and across grades and content areas. After completing a poetry unit, the ELA team created a document align power standards to students’ learning targets and desired skills.

- Distributive leadership structures such as grade leaders exemplify the role of teacher voice in making key decisions that affect student learning across the school. For example, grade leaders played an integral role in including teacher voice in the decision to change the school schedule for the New York State mathematics exams. Grade leaders proposed the administration of midterm exams, helped to institute an intervisitation process, and collaborated to create the template of questions used during intervisitation. The grade leader is responsible for the content covered in homeroom classes on a daily basis.