Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Bronx River High School
High school 08X349
3000 East Tremont Avenue
Bronx
NY 10461

Principal: Gregory Fuchck

Dates of Review:
February 6, 2018 - February 7, 2018

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 River High School serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. 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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<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>
<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>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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**Systems for Improvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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

1.3 Leveraging Resources

Rating: Well Developed

Findings

The principal makes deliberate and highly effective organizational decisions, using resources to support the school’s instructional goals and address the learning needs of staff and students. Teachers are assigned based on student needs and provide intervention and effective supports for students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Impact

Strategic organizational decisions, including hiring practices and a purposeful approach for teacher assignments, result in effective supports and access to rigorous instruction for ELLs, students with disabilities, and the school’s lowest third, helping to meet their instructional goals and leading to college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders strategically use resources to equip students for the rigorous school-designed curriculum and assessments, as well as Regents assessments. Resources support all learners and complement core content areas to promote student achievement and engagement. To support a school instructional focus, “Literacy across the curriculum, where writing is incorporated in all our classrooms,” the school purchased the Hochman Writing program, which includes professional development services to foster program implementation. As a result of this focus, based on the 2017 school’s credit metrics, 93 percent of the lowest third students earn 10+ credits, exceeding City results by 25 percentage points, as informed by the 2017 school quality guide.

- School leaders thoughtfully maximize use of school’s personnel and the weekly schedule. This includes school leaders hiring additional staff: two special education teachers, one English as a New Language (ENL) teacher, one foreign language teacher, and one full-time college prep teacher. This staff can support English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities while also creating more course sections to help all students meet their graduation requirements and prepare for higher education. To further support all learners and teachers, the school partners with Blue Engine, a New York City nonprofit, to implement more engaging and personalized experiences through team teaching, with small group instruction and high levels of differentiation. Currently, there are twelve Blue Engine Teaching Assistants (BETAs) working in ninth and tenth grade English Language Arts (ELA) and ninth grade Algebra classes. In addition, students have a daily double period of ELA, and eleventh and twelfth graders benefit with a semester of a college prep class. As a result, teachers’ and students’ schedules are aligned with the school’s instructional goals and students are engaging in meaningful and challenging academic work, such advanced placement U.S. History and advance placement Computer Science.

- The school leaders’ hiring process involves school leaders, teachers, and students. Once candidates are identified, they are informed of the school’s model and mission, then participate in interviews and demo-lessons. Once teachers are on board, they are provided with ongoing support including professional development and mentoring. The Achieve Now Academy is a supplemental program offered afterschool and on Saturday mornings, serving over-aged students, under-credited ELLs, and students with disabilities focusing on preparation for Regents exams. Hochman materials and writing strategies are used throughout to improve English writing skills and academic language proficiency. Students use Castle Learning, an online support platform, to help students meet their learning targets towards graduation. Additional interventions are provided by BETAs, who facilitate two hours of extended learning time (ELT) three days a week as well as every day at lunch. As a result, all students have access to multiple opportunities leading to the path of college and career readiness.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the belief that students learn best when engaged in demonstrating understanding through writing across the curriculum. Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points to engage all learners.

Impact
Teachers are incorporating literacy across content areas and including the use of multiple entry points and scaffolds into their lessons. However, some teachers have yet to use effective questioning and discussion techniques that will promote students’ engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and allow them to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work products.

Supporting Evidence
- Across classrooms, teacher practices consistently reflect and support schoolwide beliefs about how students learn best. Pedagogues articulated how those beliefs are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and aligned to the curricula: “We believe that students learn best by demonstrating understanding through writing. Therefore, our instructional focus is literacy across the curriculum, aligned to the Common Core shift of increased writing.” Most classes visited reflected this core belief. Across content areas, teachers engaged students in writing activities. In a chemistry class, students read different articles about the pros and cons of fission and fusion, then created a claim and provided evidence. To accomplish this task, students were given leveled articles and laptops to conduct research. In a Global Studies class, students read several articles to compare and contrast World War II in Europe and Japan.

- Across visited classrooms, teachers provided multiple entry points, scaffolding work to ensure students were highly engaged in learning. Students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, were observed in small group activities, hands-on activities, one-to-one conferencing with the teacher, using technology, and collaborating with peers to respond to tasks. In a Spanish class, based on criteria outlined by the teacher, students worked with heterogeneous partners and had to use all four language modalities. Visual representations were provided, with the teacher also using total physical response strategies to support students’ understanding. In a grade nine Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) ELA class with ELLs, students were engaged in reviewing their essays using checklists, different graphic organizers, and visuals that were provided based on their progress. The teacher was using a document camera to model the writing/editing process, and ELLs were using laptops with translating software and Bengali or Arabic keyboards. The ENL teacher provided individualized targeted support to students. As a result of these teaching practices, most students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in challenging learning that engages them in higher-order thinking.

- Although most lessons allowed for multiple entry points, there were opportunities missed to further engage students and push the level of rigor and critical thinking. For example, in an ICT English class, the teacher ensured that students were clear with the expectations of the tasks and understood how to use graphic organizers. During independent work, teachers circulated, conferencing with students and pushing their thinking, and during group work, students demonstrated high levels of engagement, as reflected in their work products. However, in an Algebra class on polynomials, a teacher asked several questions to students without giving them enough time to respond. Some students were called to solve problems on the whiteboard, but students responded to the teacher not to the students. The teacher circulated around the classroom, providing support to students seated in groups or working independently using calculators. However, some students had yet to demonstrate high levels of engagement and faced challenges understanding their tasks. Thus, teacher questioning did not sufficiently promote high levels of student thinking, resulting in uneven work products and discussion.
Findings

School leaders and teachers ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and promote college and career readiness, with an emphasis on instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data to develop rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all grades, subjects, and diverse groups of learners.

Impact

The school’s curricular decisions are purposeful to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Academic tasks are designed to push students' writing skills across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers plan and refine curricula using several sources aligned to the Common Core and incorporating the instructional shifts. These include New York City scope and sequences as well as New York State standards. To strengthen the coherence of curricula from grade to grade and provide additional support for all students, teachers embed Hochman writing strategies into their curriculum. This rigorous curriculum drives content and improves students' writing skills as well as academic and personal behaviors with demanding units of study and tasks leading to high-level text based discussions, a focus on process, more argumentative writing, and increased text complexity. For example, in an eleventh grade English assignment, “Should Gatsby pursue Daisy?” based on The Great Gatsby, students write an essay organizing complex ideas, concepts, and information to show the nature of a conflict, its effects upon a character, and its significance to the work. Students use textual evidence to develop an argument regarding Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy, clearly establishing claims, distinguishing their claims from alternate or opposing claims, and using specific, relevant, and sufficient evidence from the text to develop their arguments.

- All curricula are examined by the Bronx River High School accreditation committee to ensure that they meet standards and address the instructional shifts. Curricula adjustments are ongoing through department meetings. This collaborative work among school leaders and teachers is enhanced with the use of an online platform where curricula are shared, updated, and refined throughout the school year. In addition, reviewed planning documents show that teachers decided to use a lesson plan template that includes a learning target, do now, motivation, language/key terms, a mini-lesson, questions for assessment and understanding, and a summary. Lessons engage students by using annotation to analyze text for conflict and characterization, with students then turning and talking to discuss their annotations. These discussions include a selection of best annotation(s), an analysis of annotations, and agreement or disagreement with the annotations.

- The review of instructional planning documents revealed that teachers are using students’ data from formative and summative assessments, including those of students with disabilities and ELLs. Teachers across grades and subjects plan several scaffolds and entry points giving all students access to the curriculum. For example, a Global Studies lesson plan indicates the use of graphic organizers, essential vocabulary, leveled and translated texts in Bengali and Arabic, visuals, appropriate wait time, and reciprocal teaching strategies for ELLs. A geometry lesson plan incorporates the use of a graphic organizer for word analysis and vocabulary building, graphing calculators, the whiteboard, and document cameras. In addition, based on students’ data, teachers design groupings to address students’ specific needs for the lesson. As a result of this differentiated approach to planning, all students have access to the curriculum.
**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating:</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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**Findings**

Teachers use common assessments and rubrics aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and provide effective feedback to students about next learning steps to improve their work.

**Impact**

Assessment data is regularly collected across grades and subject areas and is used to adjust curricula and instruction. Actionable feedback to students in the form of next steps for improvement increases student achievement.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and teachers use the Hochman writing rubric for writing tasks across classrooms and grades. In addition, teachers develop Common Core-aligned rubrics to provide students with feedback on how to improve their work. Furthermore, students' progress is informed by an online grading system and student portfolios, where they keep assessments, performance data, teacher feedback, and learning goals. Portfolios shared by individual students had teachers’ feedback reflecting clear next steps for improvement and mastery of the Common Core. In addition, teachers and school leaders agreed to establish a schoolwide grading policy, which is included in student handbook, to further align to the school’s curricula across grades and subjects. As a result, coherence in messaging achievement and progress is evidenced by the students’ ability to articulate their proficiency levels, learning goals, and academic progress towards graduation.

- During a meeting, one student shared, “Teachers provide us with rubrics before each assignment and we go over each component so we have a clear expectation of what we are asked to do.” Another student added, “Rubrics are a guide to support us in completing our assignments at the highest score.” One more reported, “Rubrics are used in all subject areas and in all grades, the feedback provided by teachers is based on the rubrics.” Students mentioned use of the Hochman writing rubric, explaining the “decision-making tree” rubric, a complementary tool to help students determine the necessary steps to accomplish their writing assignments, and its connection to the writing rubric. This was evident as per a review of student work products and tasks posted on bulletin boards. Work products revealed that feedback is targeted, such as, “Remember to answer all parts of the task and use the documents one at the time to support your claim,” “Try looking for angle pairs, are there vertical angles?”, and “Make sure you are being explicit and try using transition words.” Students mentioned that teachers not only offer feedback that is helpful but also follow-up to ensure progress; they were able to share their work and clearly explain their next steps. As a result of teachers’ feedback, students are aware of their progress and the next steps to improve their work.

- Across all content areas and grades, the school uses pre- and post-unit assessments, checklists, conferencing notes, and other New York State data. Assessments are administered to ensure alignment of learning to major takeaways of content, and in the case of the New York State Regents, to monitor student-learning progress. In alignment with the instructional focus of literacy across the curriculum, teachers administered a series of Hochman beginning, middle, and end-of-year assessments to accurately measure writing growth. This also included two diagnostic exams specific to strategies. This diagnostic provided data used by teachers to target writing instruction alongside content instruction. In the ninth and tenth grade ELA classes, students take biweekly, on-demand writing assessments. These are graded using a six-point rubric and a decision tree rubric. For example, ninth grade ELA pre-assessment results revealed that the majority of the students are successful at identifying types of thinking but lack the preparation to use evidence. They also struggle with short responses and confusing inferential/critical definitions. The data gathered allow teachers to prepare targeted support to address students’ specific needs.
Findings
School leaders and staff convey high expectations through the school culture, connected to college and career readiness, in alignment with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teacher teams systematically communicate high expectations and offer clear and effective feedback and guidance supports to ensure that all students are prepared for the next level.

Impact
The school leaders and faculty have established a culture of mutual accountability and high levels of expectations are embedded in every aspect of the instructional program, thus offering students a clear pathway towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to staff through frequent cycles of observation and feedback and has aligned professional development to elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, such as planning and preparation, questioning and discussion techniques, and assessment in instruction. School leaders also provide weekly professional development sessions to implement the Hochman Writing strategies, aligned with the school's instructional focus. Observations then focus on the implementation of learned strategies. Professionalism is inherent in the school culture, where all teachers develop their own curricula, work collaboratively to ensure that students’ needs are being met, share best practices, and provide academic and emotional support for students before or after school and during lunch. Therefore, teachers are fully cognizant of the schoolwide beliefs, expectations, and protocols, resulting in shared accountability to meet those expectations.

- School leaders convey high expectations through an explicit schoolwide instructional focus on literacy across the curriculum, aligned to the Common Core shifts of increased writing. The faculty handbook presents the instructional, social-emotional, and logistical expectations that hold all teachers accountable for delivering high quality, data-driven instruction, focusing on writing across content areas using the Hochman strategies. Observation reports provide teachers with specific, actionable, timely feedback addressing the targeted elements of their practice, such as questioning, assessment, differentiation of learning, and promoting higher levels of student engagement in learning. One example of written feedback states, “A significant number of students did not speak in this lesson and most discussion was teacher to student, using some recall questions. Consider techniques to get all students involved in the discussion.”

- The school provides guidance and advisement support for students in developing high school and post-secondary success plans, with a strong emphasis on transition to college. The guidance team tracks students’ progress in the college search and application process, where they ensure that students apply to five City colleges, five State colleges, and five private colleges through a year-long course. Students are programmed for a daily college prep course in the spring semester of junior year and fall semester of senior year. Also, students have opportunities to enroll in advanced placement courses as well as college courses at Lehman College through the College Now program. Students stated that the focus on writing and research projects has been instrumental in making them college ready. For example, one student taking a course at Lehman College reported that the writing process support received at the school has made him better at annotating and use textual evidence to support arguments. Another student shared that her research assignments have helped her make real-world application of what she learned in different subjects. As a result, the school’s Regents Metrics reflect that average Regents completion has increased two percentage points from 2016 to 2017, which is nine percentage points above City and comparison group results for 2017.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

All teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaboration that promotes shared leadership, the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, and the refinement of pedagogy, leading to increased teachers’ instructional capacity and student learning. Distributive leadership structures facilitate teacher collaboration with school leaders to make decisions about teaching and learning.

Impact

As a result, of effective structures, professional collaboration has taken root with embedded structures for distributed leadership, better communication about what is happening across grades, and coherence of teacher teamwork, with increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders ensure that all teachers engage in structured, weekly, inquiry-based professional collaborations based on Common Core instructional shifts and standards. Grade level teams focus on shared students and meeting student needs, identifying students that may need social-emotional support and referring them to guidance counselors or identifying students for recognition and awards. Department teams work to embed Hochman Writing strategies into their curriculum to drive content as well as improve students’ writing skills. Curricula are shared via an online sharing platform and updated and refined throughout the school year. Curricula are examined by the accreditation committee to ensure they are meeting standards, alignment and addressing the instructional shifts. In addition, the Hochman team meets to create and facilitate professional development for all teachers and to analyze data and identity trends in student writing. Blue Engine teams analyze student data, identifying areas of concern and tailoring instruction to address these needs. These structures offer teachers opportunities to share their practices with each other and to improve in their planning and delivery of lessons. This is reflected in enhanced student academic progress, with the school increasing its average English Common Core Regents score two percentage points from 2016 to 2017, which is 8 percentage points higher than comparison groups and 1 percentage point higher than the City.

- School leaders and teachers designed a four-week cycle of ongoing professional development sessions. Over the first three weeks, new skills/strategies are introduced, teachers share and receive feedback on lessons including this new learning, and teachers bring in tracked students’ work from these lessons, examining data and noting any change. In week four the team addresses social-emotional learning and looks at the advisory curriculum. For example, on the January 2018 writing assessments, teachers determined that across all four grades, students scored the lowest on their concluding sentences. Teachers discussed instructional strategies such as modeling, mentor texts, and one-on-one supports, and designed professional development using Hochman writing strategies and templates to support students’ writing of concluding sentences. Teachers shared that the weekly cycle of professional development has helped them learn new instructional strategies, receive feedback from peers about their lesson plans, and have better understanding of their students, including their social-emotional growth.

- School leaders offer teachers leadership opportunities in the school, such as serving as department chairs, coordinators, and mentors. Teachers reported opportunities to design their own curricula, to facilitate, professional development sessions, and to provide feedback to colleagues on lesson plans. Building on teacher strengths, the school offered an Advanced Placement course in computer science and a college prep course. Teacher voice is key in the hiring process. They participate in candidate recruitment, interviews, demo lessons, and debrief about candidates with school leaders. This horizontal approach to leadership has resulted in schoolwide actions that promote student achievement.