Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Bronx Alliance Middle School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 11X355
3750 Baychester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10466

Principal: Steven Cobb

Dates of Review:
November 1, 2018 - November 2, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Elsa Kortright-Torres
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 Alliance Middle School 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>Additional Finding</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</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>Well Developed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>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>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>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>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by a theory of action in which students must be cared for, challenged, and coached. Structures are in place so that all students are known well by at least one adult who helps personalize supports.

Impact

Students are referred to as leaders in the school and have a voice in making recommendations to support culturally responsive books and initiate social injustice advocacy practices. House teacher teams meet to discuss individual students and create individualized action plans to support those students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has established systems to support the social emotional learning needs of the middle school student based on a theory of action. The school has established that students learn best when there are three conditions that are met for students: care, coach, and challenge (3 C’s). Students are randomly assigned to houses which create smaller learning communities within the school. Each house is named after a famous social justice leader. Each house has a student council team led by a minister who serves as a liaison between the students in the house and staff members. These councils meet on a regular basis and have had a voice in selecting culturally responsive books and practices such as being part of teacher hiring committees. Staff members and student leaders facilitate house activities to promote their core values: Persistence, Accountability, Communication, and Teamwork (PACT). In the beginning of the school year, there are five days planned to have students learn about these core values, and participate in team building activities, as well as when policies and procedures are introduced and practiced. Using a point system, houses compete, initiate, guide, and lead team building activities and community service initiatives. An example of student voice and self-advocacy was when students felt the need to write letters about community businesses to their local councilman.

- Each morning, the school leaders have a short assembly called with all students to begin the school day on a positive note. The school has put in place a system so that each student is known well by at least one adult in the school. Each staff member is assigned fifteen students to support. There is a period each day embedded in the school schedule for advisory. During advisory, students discuss social justice issues such as racial equity, gender equality, and how to handle difficult situations by emphasizing the school’s core values, especially communication, to build healthy relationships. Parents, students and teachers stated that the school has changed for the better and has become a calmer atmosphere for students to learn.

- There are processes in place to monitor student attendance and the state of mind of students by having a checking in and checking out system. Attendance is closely monitored by the school social worker and by having a case management approach. Chronic attendance is handled and closely monitored by a staff member assigned to the student to build a relationship, make phone calls to parents, and make recommendations for additional interventions. Using a tracker, chronic truancy is tracked by student and action plans are discussed and shared with the rest of the teachers in their house. The school follows a curriculum for social emotional learning, and students monitor their own behavior by using a color-coding system. Students stated, and all agreed that they value advisory and checking in and out with their advisors. One student shared that advisory helps her learn how to solve problems so that she is prepared for the real world. Another student shared that advisory is important because students that are emotionally fragile can go to someone they trust to talk and solve personal problems. These interventions have resulted in increased attendance rates and a reduction of serious infractions as reflected in the latest Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS).
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
Teachers use assessments that are aligned to the school's curricula. The school's common assessments determine student progress towards goals.

Impact
Teachers provide feedback to students regarding their achievement using rubrics and exit slips. The results of common assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers use assessments and rubrics aligned to the school’s curricula. For example, in all grades, teachers use the Teachers College Reading Writing Program (TCRWP) rubrics to provide feedback that is timely and actionable for students. Students shared receiving actionable feedback from teachers using rubrics, checklists, and on exit slips. For example, in a math class, the teacher provided an exit slip for students to complete about linear equations and provided feedback such as “label the slope and y-intercept.” Students spoke about receiving actionable feedback verbally and on rubrics. One student shared that in a Higher Order Thinking Task (HOTT) she was provided with feedback to use descriptive words and as a result, she obtained a better grade on the assignment. Feedback from teachers to students has begun to become meaningful as heard in conversations with a few students and teachers.

- Across classrooms, actionable feedback was evident in the use of glows and grows. Student work on bulletin boards reflect the use of post-it notes to highlight what students do well and suggestions to improve. Students also use checklists such as the TCRWP narrative checklist and teacher created checklists to ensure that students write quality endings for realistic fiction. Seemingly, in math classrooms, student work on bulletin boards such as on HOTT the teacher wrote “label you dimensions” or “I love your explanation of your thought process.” In addition, teachers used check marks and write brief comments about student work. Students shared, and all agreed that they receive actionable feedback and that the use of checklists and rubrics helps them see what they need to work on to improve.

- The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals and the data is used to make curricular adjustments. For example, the school uses interim assessments such as Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) for ELA and pre and post unit assessments for math. The school analyzes the data by comparing the percentage by proficiency levels and by conducting item analysis. Analysis of data has resulted in implementing strategies such as the 10-10-10 in all subject areas so that teachers provide small group instruction and individualized coaching of strategies for reading and writing as part of the TCRWP. A focus standard is identified after analyzing the data for reading and writing on State assessments. Action plans are created to address the focus standard. For example, an action plan was created to address the need for students to use dialogue in their writing and to have better results in the constructive response questions of the State assessments. Student progress in ELA and math has improved and results are starting to demonstrate the closing of the achievement gap but has yet to show increased mastery for all students.
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 ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts as evident in lesson plans and units of study. Curricula and Higher Order Thinking Tasks (HOTT) consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Purposeful decisions to integrate literacy across the content areas build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. Additionally, lesson plans that emphasize rigorous tasks require higher-order skills across grades and subjects and ensure that all students, including students with disabilities are supported.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty ensure that their units of study for English Language Arts (ELA) are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts. The school adopted the TCRWP and have decided to focus on citing sources in writing. In a grade seven ELA unit plan, students learn about writing realistic fiction by using a mentor text. Similarly, in a grade eight ELA unit plan, students are tasked with reading Thirteen and a Half as a mentor text and writing a compelling lead. In a grade six social studies lesson plan, the students are tasked with reading Lucy: Ethiopia’s Star Skeleton to determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source and use it to accurately summarize using the Claim, Evidence, and Reasoning (CER) strategy. These unit plans evidence coherence across grades and subjects of using mentor texts and citing from sources to write essays with strong supporting details.

- In math, the school uses a Common Core aligned program. The school's focus for math is to cover depth over breadth and for that purpose, teachers conduct lesson studies to ensure that lessons are aligned to the Common Core, instructional shifts, and are adjusted so that there is coherence across grade levels and supports for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. Additionally, the school uses Hess’ Cognitive Rigor Matrix (HCRM) to evaluate the level of rigor of all units. Units of study evidence a focus standard for the grade level as well as coherence such as the use of the restate, answer the question, cite text evidence, and explain (RACE) and CER strategies.

- In addition to the core curricula, each grade level has implemented HOTT. These tasks are meant to push student thinking, prepare them for college and careers as these are independent tasks that incorporate higher-order thinking skills. For example, in an ELA HOTT the teachers tasked students with creating a scene for a character using multiple perspectives. Teachers use the HCRM to ensure that the task was rigorous for example, students had to present the scene in third person and first-person using dialogue, action, and inner thinking. In a social studies HOTT, the students wrote a literary analysis to compare and contrast the Mayans, Incas, and Aztecs by citing textual evidence and demonstrating academic language. In a grade eight math HOTT, students modeled slope and critiqued the reasoning of each other. In a grade eight science HOTT students analyzed oxygen concentration data and draw a conclusion on the effects of sources of energy on organisms and populations in an ecosystem. The student wrote in his conclusion, “according to the graph, the deeper you go down under water, the oxygen concentration decreases and thus less sunlight for algae and other plants to create oxygen and remove carbon dioxide.” The school ensures that all students are academically challenged with the consistent use of rigorous habits such as reasoning, evaluating, creating and defending their thinking with evidence.
### Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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#### Findings

Teacher practice across classrooms reflect school beliefs that students learn best when they are cared for, coached, and challenged. In addition, the faculty has developed structures to strengthen instructional practices by implementing scaffolds and learning strategies for all students.

#### Impact

Teaching strategies aligned to Danielson *Framework for Teaching* provide multiple entry points for all learners so that they are engrossed in cognitively engaging tasks.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers use a 10-10-10 strategy. Mirrored after the Workshop Model, 10-10-10 provides the teachers with a structure to spend 10 minutes conferring with an individual student, 10 minutes conferring with a group of students, and 10 minutes to convene a group to conduct an instructional activity to accelerate student learning. For example, in a grade seven classroom, the teacher had a schedule of the 10-10-10 by tables. It was observed across classrooms, that teachers confer with individual students or with groups of students at a time. In one grade seven ELA classroom, the teacher met with one student to guide the student in creating a satisfying ending by tying up loose ends and resolving the character’s unresolved difficulties. She asked the student guiding questions such as “what do you want this character to feel like?” and “what did she do to get to that?” while other students worked in groups or individually using a narrative checklist. In a grade eight math classroom, the teacher met with groups of students as they engaged in a carousel activity to solve real-world problems leading to two linear equations in two variables.

- Across classrooms, all learners including ELLs and students with disabilities participated in higher-order thinking activities. For example, in a grade eight social studies classroom, the teacher provided translated documents to ELLs as they worked on writing a persuasive essay about social justice and its connection to slavery in America. In another self-contained classroom, students learned about early humans and were grouped according to their reading levels. The teacher met with two students, translated the activity, and provided a laptop to annotate the text using the CER strategy. Instructional practices across classrooms such as the use of scaffolds, technology, questions, grouping, student to student discussions, and solving real world problems are rooted on the school’s beliefs of how students learn best and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- In a grade eight ELA classroom, the Special Education Teacher Support Service and the English as a New Language (ENL) teacher worked with their students in the classroom and provided supports as needed. Students with disabilities were supported by having a graphic organizer to jot down answers to two questions in the graphic organizer, “what has the author done?” and “how has she achieved this?” after reading a section at a time. Students also used an anchor chart that listed “Writerly Moves that will take you from summarizing to storytelling.” The ENL teacher provided a laptop for translation and a translated version of the mentor text. In a grade eight science class, the teacher provided a list of guiding questions to enhance student discussion in their groups. He also provided visuals in a PowerPoint presentation to help students understand food chains and food webs. Students were tasked with creating a food web and participating in a gallery walk to examine how one plant or animal affects the other. Multiple entry points that engaged all learners permeated throughout classrooms.
Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:** 3.4 High Expectations

**Rating:** Proficient

**Findings**

School leaders consistently convey high expectations through instructional logs saved in web-based platforms that reflect ongoing feedback and professional learning aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Teacher teams establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students.

**Impact**

Ongoing communication and support by school leaders around classroom visits support teachers’ understanding and awareness of expectations around teaching and learning. House teams work toward ensuring that students are provided with a clear picture of their progress by using Jupiter and portfolios.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff rooted in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Through the Instructional Coaching Log, coaches and school leaders capture notes of meetings with teachers based on the school’s instructional focus and components of Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. These notes are saved in Google Drive which school leaders and teachers have access to make recommendations, provide additional feedback, and promote a system of accountability. For example, in one teacher’s instructional log, the teacher was provided with next steps after discussing her goals for the year. The instructional coach stated, “We discussed the Danielson rubric to show how a rating happens. We looked at 3d to see where your lesson landed on the rubric. We reviewed the rubric to understand all of the components.” Teachers hold meetings with school leaders and coaches after conducting walkthroughs to ensure that there is constant communication regarding school expectations for professionalism, instruction, and the school’s instructional focus.

- School leaders begin the day at the school with a full school assembly. These assemblies called Affirmations are meant to remind students of the school’s core values PACT and to provide motivational words of encouragement. Students are also informed of happenings such as reminders of high school application deadlines, and other pertinent announcements. Students participate in advisory every day. During this period of time, about fifteen students meet with a teacher who is the advisory teacher. Students are provided with laptops so that they can see the progress that they are making toward achieving progress in preparation for their next level. For example, during an advisory period, students were observed checking their grades and conferring with the teacher to ensure that students understand their next steps. A meeting with students, evidenced that all students know about their progress through the conversations they have with their advisor and by having access to their grades in Jupiter. Students also stated, and all agreed that advisors help them set up goals such as preparing for high school and beyond by providing resources. One student as well as others during the student meeting spoke about their future goals to attend college and that during advisory, their teachers expose them to websites, specialized high school information, and advise them to be responsible and persistent.

- Through a student handbook, entitled, *A Serious Leader’s Guide to School Success*, school leaders inform students of the student mission, vision, and motto which is “If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together,” an African proverb. Students stated, and all agreed that the teachers and the school leaders push them “to go far beyond their limits.” Students are also aware that they must demonstrate mastery in order to succeed and move to the next level. Students with the assistance of their teachers are responsible to create a promotion portfolio where they keep their best work and present it at the end of the year as evidence of being prepared for the next level.
## Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

### Impact

Teachers' collaborations have strengthened their instructional capacity. Teachers make decisions to incorporate small group instruction and social emotional learning through the content areas and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet on a regular basis as part of their weekly schedule to analyze student work to inform instructional practices. At these meetings, Collaborative Work Analysis and Analyzing Leader Work (ALW) protocols are used. For example, after the interim assessments, teachers analyzed student performance with a specific lens to look at the disproportionality of African American boys and students with disabilities and what can be done to support these students. Based on inquiry work, it was determined that lessons in mathematics had to include academic vocabulary and station learning to motivate students. As a result, lessons in mathematics include academic vocabulary and teachers are incorporating stations into the mathematics periods. An assessment calendar to track student progress after implementing these strategies and a calendar for inquiry work has been established and shared with the staff. Teachers of mathematics stated that they are learning from their colleagues and coach on how to implement more hands-on and real-life applications into math lessons, especially changing from teacher directed lessons to station learning.

- Teacher teams meet on a regular basis to keep track of student work in all subject areas. Particular attention is in the area of writing and students using their inner thinking and more dialogue in their writing. The ELA team has met to analyze various work samples using the ALW protocol. Minutes of these meetings are captured and evidence the collaboration of teachers in identifying strengths and areas of focus for students. For example, in several of the minutes, teachers discuss how students use their inner thinking in their writing, however, students are not being intentional in the use of dialogue and providing descriptive language. Teachers who present the work of their students are provided with next steps as suggestions from their colleagues. Some of the suggestions recorded in minutes of these meetings have been to incorporate graphic organizers, flash draft, conferring, and 10-10-10 in which students are provided with an exemplar of more time to plan their writing.

- Teachers report that they have a voice in adopting curricula and materials appropriate for their students. Distributed leadership opportunities are in place such as having teachers attend professional learning events and sharing their learning with their colleagues during professional learning on Mondays. In addition, teachers are participants of committees to hire new teachers and to select curricula for the school such as the addition of TCRWP and a math program. Teachers are also expected to facilitate meetings and lead professional learning initiatives. In the summer, teachers participated in professional learning and have led lesson studies where adjustments are made such as creating activities that are meaningful for students. An example of this was incorporating music into the ELA poetry unit where students wrote their poems and had an opportunity to create rap songs. Teachers reported that they feel empowered to make learning more authentic and students expressed that they were motivated to attend classes because lessons are more interesting.