

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

BELL Academy

Middle School Q294

**18-25 212 STREET
Queens
NY11360**

Principal: David Abbott

**Dates of review: March 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael Dantona**

The School Context

BELL Academy is a middle school with 371 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 4% Black, 24% Hispanic, 41% White, and 31% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.5%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

| <i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i> | Area of: | Rating: |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 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. | Celebration | Well Developed |
| 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 | Additional Findings | Well Developed |
| 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. | Focus | Well Developed |

School Culture

| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Area of: | Rating: |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations. | Additional Findings | Well Developed |

Systems for Improvement

| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Area of: | Rating: |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning. | Additional Findings | Well Developed |

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and staff align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts while embedding rigorous academic tasks for all learners to demonstrate their thinking.

Impact

The strategic alignment of curricula promotes college and career readiness for all students and has resulted in coherence across grades and subject areas. The school-wide focus on the use of text-based evidence has promoted rigorous academic habits and higher order thinking for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- School curriculum maps and tasks use a blend of resources such as Expeditionary Learning, Engage NY, Connected Mathematics Project 3, Illustrative Math, New York City Department of Education social studies scope and sequence and Glencoe Science. Unit plans across content areas include essential questions, standard aligned learning goals, targeted vocabulary, resources to support English language learners and students with disabilities. For example, an English language arts (ELA) map on Greek Mythology included a “Meet the Greek Gods Reading Booklet with guided questions and leveled graphic organizers”, while a math map included “video supports to introduce real-world investigations using inquiry based learning.” Individualized extensions to the curriculum are derived from the Renzulli Learning Interest-A-Lizer.
- English language arts, social studies and science each integrate the use of text-based evidence, while the mathematics curriculum focuses on constructing viable arguments, creating coherence across grades and subject areas. For example, in math, students are expected to “solve problems in real-world contexts that require them to make inferences and reason about real-world situations while applying number properties” while in social studies students are expected to “present arguments for certain views or actions with reference to specific criteria that support the argument; work to understand multiple perspectives.”
- Within and across grades and content areas, higher-order skills are emphasized across curricula. For example, a sixth grade task embedded in the ELA curriculum includes the expectation that students will continually develop their analytical and comparative writing and discussion skills as they respond to prompts, support claims, analyze character, conflict, and plot development, while providing supporting textual evidence in constructed responses. Within the same unit, students will create a crosswalk between the archetypal “*Hero’s Journey*” and “*The Lightning Thief*” that connects informational to literary text. Students in an 8th grade social studies class are expected to write an argumentative essay about whether or not immigration should be restricted.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

While teachers create and utilize common assessments, have common grading policies and rubrics aligned with the school curricula, ongoing checks for understanding were not evident across a vast majority of classrooms.

Impact

Teacher assessment practices promote a clear picture of student mastery and progress enabling the school to make purposeful instructional and curricula adjustments, however effective in-class adjustments were not evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Across a vast majority of classrooms, there was evidence of rubrics aligned with school curricula along with corresponding actionable and meaningful feedback to students. For example, a teacher shared, "I appreciate your work on this essay. The "Multiple Paragraph Outline" seems to have helped the organization of this essay and provided clear next steps on what the student needed to do to further organize paragraphs for the next writing assignment. " Another teacher shared with a student "You worked really hard and it shows! Your background section is thorough and you discuss the concepts necessary to form a hypothesis. Your procedure is very detailed and someone could follow it very easily. This student was also provided explicit next steps and strategies to enhance his lab report to ensure his work was consistent throughout.
- A school-wide assessment calendar demonstrates that common assessments are being administered across grades and subject areas. Student growth toward meeting the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards is evident in a standards-based progress report issued to all students and parents. For example, data from a grade 7 math assessment revealed growth of all students as evidenced by a 32 point mean score change from pre-assessment to the post assessment.
- A school-wide template is utilized to surface areas of strength and weakness within the given unit of study for all students including English language learners and students with disabilities. Data from these assessments are utilized to adjust curricula and instruction as evidenced by revised maps and grouping of students. Social studies teachers utilize pre-assessment data to modify their unit to include an enrichment component for students performing in the top third to address their specific needs. Students share that their teachers place them in groups based on their performance on tasks and assessments.
- Across classrooms, teachers utilize ongoing checks for understanding, such as using standards based checklists and Socratic seminar, as well as providing opportunities for students to self-assess using content specific rubrics to support their needs. Furthermore, teachers utilize Google classroom, student self-assessment rubrics and teacher checklists to monitor student progress; however this practice was not evident across the vast majority classrooms. For example, in one classroom student participation within a Socratic seminar was charted using a document camera to ensure students held each other accountable for engaging in the conversation. Conversely in some classrooms, evidence of checks for understanding did not always reflect effective adjustments to meet the needs of individual students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teacher pedagogy reflects a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that are aligned to the curricula and informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Within the vast majority of classrooms, discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Discussions at the team and classroom level have led to teaching practices that promote high levels of student thinking, engagement and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and Core Inquiry Team members developed an instructional focus that emphasizes Danielson's Framework for Teaching component 3B- which centers on questioning and discussion techniques. Across the vast majority of classrooms students engaged in high quality discussions in pairs or small groups, where they were encouraged to justify their responses with text-based details or to construct viable arguments in math. For example, in an ELA classroom, students engaged in a discussion where one student shared that in the article, it says that Japan deliberately attacked the United States and discussed how they negotiated peace but lied. The student called on a one of his peers, who followed up with another question and asked "didn't they try to meet with the United States and it was denied?" This level of student discourse allowed students to demonstrate higher order thinking, participation and ownership of their learning.
- Across a vast majority of classrooms there was clear alignment of teacher lesson plans to the expectations of the curricula. For example, in math students were charged with grappling with real world problem solving tasks requiring them to determine the number of bicycles and All-Terrain Vehicles that were purchased for an outdoor adventure store by creating and solving algebraic equations. In another math classroom, students were also engaged in a real world task that required students to write and evaluate expressions to represent and solve a Hershey Park admission problem, promoting the use of higher order thinking skills for all learners.
- Teaching practices across the vast majority of classrooms visited, encouraged students to hold themselves accountable to their own work by promoting clear expectations for students. For example, in a math classroom students were required to self and peer-assess their work against a rubric. One student shared that he rated himself a Level 3 and stated "he needed more details in his response. I could have added more integers to represent my algebraic equations." In another classroom, groups of students were accountable for developing an investigative research question for a strawberry DNA lab. After engaging in a group discussion, a student in the group shared their research question with the class, which was "what is the effect of the amount of strawberries on the amount of DNA?" Student discourse reflected high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

Findings

The Danielson Framework for Teaching is utilized to consistently communicate high expectations to staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations to families connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

An environment of mutual accountability has been established through consistent communication to staff, resulting in a culture for learning and professionalism. Ongoing communication to parents promotes a successful partnership to support student growth.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations for classroom instruction and professionalism through the use of school developed videos. Teachers work collaboratively with administration to develop Danielson videos to norm and calibrate the expectations from the Danielson Framework for Teaching. An example includes a teacher, sharing how she engaged in planning and preparation to engage students. In addition, teachers share that they are encouraged to search for and attend workshops. One teacher cited that she was given an opportunity to attend an Apple workshop, resulting in the development of an action plan to provide professional learning opportunities for the school.
- High expectations are consistently communicated around the school-wide instructional focus through the school's professional development calendar which includes learning opportunities for staff around the school-wide instructional focus. These efforts resulted in the Core Inquiry Team developing a school-wide rubric to measure the focus area. Staff utilizes these rubrics to provide feedback to students to ensure that they are aware of their next learning steps as well as to measure the growth in Danielson's Framework for Teaching component 3B- questioning and discussion techniques.
- Parents receive communication from school leaders and staff in a variety of formats. Parents explain that they receive information through School Messenger, an on-line communication tool, the school website, school department meetings, student progress reports and Engrade. A parent explained that they receive information, which assists in supporting their child at home, specifically citing the school-wide emphasis of text-based details in writing. A workshop calendar is provided to all parents, which include opportunities to learn about and support school-wide goals. For example, school staff presents parents with workshops on Socratic Seminar, Odyssey learning an online math resource and writing lab reports and using evidence to support claims.

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| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

Teacher leadership plays an integral role across the school as teachers and teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of instructional practice and student data, with a focus on the schools lowest third.

Impact

Distributed leadership structures and the use of a teacher teams have resulted in the shared improvement in teacher practice and the growth of all students, specifically the schools lowest one third.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams systematically analyze student work through the use of the “Tuning Protocol”. This was evident as a teacher team analyzed student writing for a child in the schools’ lowest one third, with a focus on analysis. Teachers identified the student’s strengths and areas in need of improvement. This work resulted in teachers sharing pedagogical strategies, such as a “Close Reading Symbols” document to support students in deepening their understanding of the text, to support their peer as well as to improve student outcomes.
- The Core Inquiry Team has developed a school-wide rubric to measure student discussions. Consistent work towards the schools’ instructional focus has resulted in improvement of student discourse in the classroom as evidenced by pre-post assessment results. For example, grade 6 English language arts mean pre-assessment results revealed that 60% of students scored at a level 3 or 4, while mean post assessment data revealed 83.5% of students scored at levels 3 or 4. In addition to improved student outcomes, teacher pedagogy in the area of Danielson 3B has improved as this component has seen an eleven percent gain in teachers being rated effectively.
- Teacher teams have influenced changes to curriculum and instruction across grades and subject areas. Teacher teams have identified a series of power words, which have been included in school curriculum maps and are infused in a variety of ways during the lesson including do nows, discussion questions, homework and exit slips promoting mastery among teachers and students. These power words include, justify, infer, analyze, and evaluate.
- Distributed leadership structures promote shared accountability as evidenced by opportunities for teacher-led professional development sessions, such as those on Socratic Seminar which was presented to staff to increase student-to-student discussions. This leadership structure has led to the implementation of this instructional practice as was evident during a classroom visit, where students engaged in a class Socratic discussion based on this question, “Was Japan justified in the bombing of Pearl Harbor?”