Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx Academy is a high school with 385 students from grade 10 through grade 12. The school population comprises 42% Black, 55% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 68%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped.

The Bronx Academy High School is a place where students feel that they have been given a second chance to complete their education. Students are comfortable in an environment where they are supported in "getting along" and in "working through problems." The school allegiance to promoting student success is evidenced in their commitment to ensure that adults are aptly equipped to provide support. Staff members receive training from a partner community-based organization on strategies that empower students to succeed in life. This is supplemented by the school's offering of information through newsletters and workshops, which inform parent and students about how improving student behavior positively impacts on student success.

In contrast, the school does not yet provide a clearly State standards-aligned curriculum that fully prepares all students to meet the rigors of post-graduation opportunities. Additionally, instruction is also not suitably varied to address both student learning strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, students are not consistently successful on summative State examinations. These curriculum and instructional shortcomings are closely correlated with the lack of structures and systems that support the deep analysis of data. This weakens the school's efforts to provide authentic student goals. As a result, students are not primed to take full ownership of tracking and adjusting their next learning steps.

While the school uses some resources to secure support for student counseling, they have yet to clearly align resource usage with instructional goals that meet student academic needs. This situation is compounded by the lack of a firm, strategic school-wide plan that establishes a cycle of implementation, monitoring and revisions of both instructional and organizational interventions. Consequently, the school is notably deficient in truly providing a sound structure for promoting student and adult growth.

There is, however, a movement of excitement amongst some teachers who are eager to improve student achievement. They are enthusiastic about deepening their craft as evidence in their willingness to attend team meetings and exchange teaching experiences. As was stated by one Bronx Academy stakeholder, "We are in progress."

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a rich and varied curriculum that is appropriately rigorous and encourages improved attendance by offering differentiated opportunities, which engage students in their learning.

  o The school has rewritten the English language arts curriculum. The work shows a school emphasis on further developing student writing. ==However, it is not yet extended to include rigorous habits that expand student thinking and prepare them for the challenges of college.==

  o Learning opportunities are generic in most subjects. ==The school's selected curriculum, across disciplines, does not offer multiple entry points and resources that promote student engagement.== As a result, students of varying levels are not sufficiently challenged.

- Establish a strategic plan for the ==careful monitoring of student data so that all organizational and instructional initiatives are linked to accelerating student learning.==

  o The school has made mid-year adjustments, such as offering the opportunity for absent student to make-up work through an online program. However, this and other decisions are not part of a structure and system of interim and long term goal planning. As a result, the school is unable to accurately monitor student progress towards reaching goals.

  o The same, or similar, school goals are maintained from one year to the next. However, alignment with changing student needs and long-term impact has not been effective due to lack of monitoring. Therefore, they are unable to improve student achievement over multiple years.

- Ensure that teachers are fully prepared to ==develop individual and sub-group student goals that promote ownership by students and give them a good understanding of their next academic steps.==

  o Student work is sometimes graded using a Regents rubric. ==But feedback does not specify the steps necessary to improve outcomes.== Students, therefore, are unable to use this information to continue their academic growth.

  o Periodic assessment information is reviewed by administrators with teachers. This information is not yet used to track progress or make adjustments to instruction. Thus, some class lessons are redundant.

- Implement a <mark>school-wide system of data gathering, analysis and usage which provides all stakeholders with an overview of student strengths and weaknesses that inform instruction and organizational decisions.</mark>

    o School leaders do not engage faculty members in conversations that analyze assorted school-wide data deeply. In addition, the administration has not yet sufficiently analyzed summative data to get a clear understanding of areas of needs and strengths. They have solely developed the broad-stroked goal of improving reading comprehension and writing. As a result, root causes of student challenges are not identified or addressed.

    o School leaders make organizational and instructional decisions based on a cursory review of summative scholarship data. <mark>For example, there has not been a full review of the correlation between student pass rates in class and Regents scores.</mark> As a result, the impact of the instructional plans is weakened because they do not address true areas of student need.

- Deepen teacher skills in the understanding and usage of differentiated instructional strategies that ensure all student learning needs are met.

    o A few teachers offer students one or two varied activities in the same lesson. These learning opportunities are not based on the knowledge of students' learning styles or needs. <mark>Therefore, instruction is undifferentiated and achievement is limited.</mark>

    o <mark>Instruction and questioning does not provide opportunities for students to deepen their thinking. This is evident in the minimal expectation for student work products. For example, student exit project assignments lack rigor and are not aligned with the school goal of college readiness for all students.</mark>

- Clearly align usage of resources with academic improvement which match data-driven identification of students so that teachers can use these resources to accelerate student progress.

    o The school utilizes a multitude of instructional programs intended to accelerate student progress. However, the scope of these initiatives does not align with the specific areas of need for targeted students. For example, student academic challenges have not been impacted through the school's usage of learning and thinking maps.

    o School leaders reprogrammed the school to offer all core subjects between 10AM and 2PM. However, there has been little evidence that student attendance or achievement has increased.