

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**THE SCHOOL FOR CLASSICS: AN ACADEMY OF  
THINKERS, WRITERS AND PERFORMERS**

**High School 683**

**370 FOUNTAIN AVENUE  
BROOKLYN  
NY 11208**

**Principal: JANICE ROSS**

**Dates of review: March 5 - 6, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Karen Watts**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

THE SCHOOL FOR CLASSICS: AN ACADEMY OF THINKERS, WRITERS AND PERFORMERS is a high school with 243 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 53% Black, 37% Hispanic, 0% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 89.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is well-developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's comprehensive curriculum emphasizes key standards with rigorous tasks to align with Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) that promote student mastery of content and skills. (1.1)
  - o The school has aligned its 9th and 10th grade English language arts (ELA) and social studies curricula so that informational texts with historical context are infused within the ELA curriculum to increase understanding and comprehension in both courses leading to improvements in learning. The math curriculum spans Algebra I to advanced placement Calculus AB, and science spans Living Environment to Physics, thus increasing postsecondary readiness. The courses in the thematic performing arts sequence cover both the production and the performance aspects of the major with students going on to competitive colleges and conservatories to study the various performance arts. Additionally, the identification and incorporation of key standards and academic tasks aligned to the CCLS is evident in the school's extensive curricula maps and promote the use of informational texts, argumentative writing, modeling, justifying and citing evidence from the text across subject areas. Teachers use 'Task Analysis Guides' to ensure that they are creating tasks that make higher level cognitive demands of all students. These practices promote improvements in scholarships for all students including English language learners (ELL's) and students with disabilities (SWD), result in passing percentages in all classes at 90% or better, and thoroughly prepare students starting in the 9th grade for college level work.
- The school's belief in student centered instruction results in differentiated and engaging lessons that meet students' needs and improve academic outcomes. (1.2)
  - o Across all classrooms students experience instructional consistency in the level of rigor of tasks and consistency with which instruction is delivered because all teachers use a blackboard configuration that consists of an aim, objective, brain shaker, agenda, class-time, share out, summary and homework. Teachers use lesson plan templates to ensure that they carefully plan their lessons for delivery via the workshop model and incorporate instructional technology to provide well-matched instruction. Students' work is of the highest quality, whether in their notebooks, portfolios, on classroom bulletin boards, or those out in the hallways that reflect the use of rubrics with relevant feedback and next steps aligned to CCLS. All lessons are differentiated including translation for ELL's, and when suitable a differentiated template to address the needs of ELL's and SWD's. Differentiation is also evident in the homework product or how notes are taken during the independent work time. In one class students read different sections of an article based on their reading skill level, completed one of three graphic organizers to summarize their ideas on the topic, and then discussed the articles by answering differentiated questions according to student's reading skill levels. In another class, students read multiple and different texts so that some could make inferences, others evaluated the validity and accuracy of the information, ideas, themes, opinions and experiences in the text, while others determined meaning of unfamiliar words using context clues, and yet others applied thinking skills such as interpreting data, facts and ideas from informational texts. These practices allow students at all levels in a class to enter the lesson, participate, and demonstrate their thinking on the topic at hand.

- School leaders strategically secure resources and effectively program teacher time to meet students' needs so that academic achievement increases. (1.3)
  - The principal is strategic in hiring staff members who bring diverse skills to the school. Teachers coach sport teams and run afterschool clubs, in addition to their classroom responsibilities. The school has incorporated the 37½ minute period into the students' schedule so that all students stay for needed remediation or enrichment on two days, alternating with advisory on the other two days. All students are programmed for lunch during the fourth period so that teachers have common planning time to meet in teams for both inquiry work and curriculum development. In response to the results from data analyses, students are now programmed for Living Environment during a double period for both semesters in grade 9, and are programmed for as many as four semesters of Algebra I, if needed. Also, based on the results of mock Regents' exams given in November and April, students are moved to classes with teachers who can strategically assist them in being successful. The principal has invested in technology resources for all classrooms so that they now have Smartboards that are used daily, smart response systems in math, and other technology resources such as document cameras, virtual labs, united streaming, Kaplan SAT , a new computer lab, and three mobile laptop carts. These resources allow teachers to plan and deliver engaging, well-matched lessons leading to improvements in student performance.
  
- Teachers effectively analyze formative and summative exam data and use a system for students' self-assessment to inform instructional decisions so that academic performance increases. (2.2)
  - Teachers create item analyses of past Regents and unit exams so they can identify trends in students' performance to guide in the development and revision of curricula maps, units, lesson plans, and academic tasks to better meet students' needs. Across classrooms, students use rubrics that help them to self assess their progress in the lesson and to inform the teacher via their use of color-coded chips of their understanding as the lesson progresses. In one classroom, a teacher gave extra time for students to complete an assignment after she checked in with students and learned that they have not finished the task. Rubrics guide students in improving their work and teachers use the rubrics to provide feedback, next steps for all students on all tasks, and adjustments to instructional practice as needed. Additionally, the embedded practice of teachers' use of data from both summative and formative exams to group students provides for tasks and activities that address specific learning needs in the all lessons.
  
- School leaders and peers provide timely feedback from frequent observations and intervisitations that promote teachers' professional growth and effectiveness that result in students' academic success. (4.1)
  - The principal and assistant principal engage in frequent observations of all teachers and provide timely feedback on classroom management, the rigor of the task, content knowledge of the teacher, how well time was used, how well the lesson was organized and planned, how aligned the questions and discussions were to the topic, handouts used during the lesson, in-class assessments, checks for understanding, written student work, how aligned this work was to the CCLS, and how well the differentiation of the lesson supported the ELL and SWD. Teachers use intervisitation rubrics based on the Danielson Rubric with Praises, Concerns and Wonderings (PCW) as they visit the classrooms of their peers on a monthly basis. Teachers provide feedback on the quality of the tasks,

- student work products, and the rubrics used by students to guide the creation of the student work. Additionally, teachers focus on one domain of the Danielson rubric during each round of peer observations and provide feedback on the level of evidence of the positive attributes of that domain in the classrooms. These practices lead to a very transparent approach to improving teacher quality with everyone in the school taking responsibility, resulting in improvements in students' academic outcomes as evidenced in Regents' pass rates at 75 % or better on the ELA and Global Studies exams.
- The school provides academic and youth development supports that create a calm, respectful, and nurturing environment promoting students' learning. (1.4)
    - o The school is a bully-free zone, with very nice and friendly staff members and students and a strong culture of everyone wanting to help others. Pervasive throughout the school, teachers are helping teachers, students help each other following the motto of asking a fellow student twice for assistance before you ask the teacher, and/or teachers are helping students. Teachers and students freely communicate their concerns thus contributing to the supportive environment. Administrators and teachers are open to student ideas, students feel free in expressing themselves, and students who can go to teachers if they need someone to speak to feel safe because the school is small and they are known to each other and to the staff by name. The student government association plays a strong role in the school by influencing the offering of extracurricular activities that include glee club, spoken word programs, dance, Peace Week, March Madness, Spirit Week, performing arts shows, various sports activities, the school beautification project, and the Black History Month show. The school offers ample opportunities for after school activities from assistance with home work and projects, to improvement of exam grades, to credit recovery and preparation for the PSAT and SAT exams and applications to colleges, thus providing many options to promote learning and student growth.
  - The principal's clear vision is supported by data-based goals and implemented via action plans that accelerate instructional adjustments to increase students' academic and social-emotional growth. (3.1)
    - o The principal's long range vision of creating a premier career and technical education performing arts school in District 19 is reflected in both her short- and long-term goals that are embraced and supported by all constituents. Parents, students, and teachers, who participate in the planning and goal setting at the school primarily through the parent teacher association (PTA) and the school leadership team (SLT) are active participants in analyzing the school's data, setting goals, and developing the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). Students and parents provide input regarding the programs that are offered at the school such as advanced placement courses, calculus and physics, college workshops, and field trips. Parents indicate that the school should be a model for District 19 because they have seen their children's grades improve tremendously since attending this school. One parent spoke of how the practice of journaling helps her very shy child express his thoughts in writing and has resulted in him becoming a very out spoken person with lots of friends. Parents spoke of their children being more serious about schoolwork, speaking more intelligently and being more humble and that special needs students are supported in ways that give parents comfort in having them attend this school. One parent stated that as a resident of District 19, she would continue to support the school even after her child graduates.

## What the school needs to improve

- Enhance the system for sharing students' academic and behavioral progress with families so that the feedback is timely and student performance increases. (2.4)
  - o The school provides workshops for parents in the use of ARIS Parent Link, and shares information on how well their children are doing in school with relevant next learning steps, through telephone calls or face-to-face meetings including parent /teacher conferences. However, the school does not yet incorporate an electronic system, so that parents and students can access daily lessons and assignments, student attendance, punctuality, and behavior anecdotes. As a result, timeliness of feedback on student performance is impacted.
- Provide differentiated professional and leadership development to improve teacher quality in the classroom and build school wide leadership capacity. (4.3)
  - o The school provides professional development opportunities for all teachers in lesson planning, Bloom's questioning techniques, providing access points for all students, Depth of Knowledge, creating student centered and differentiated lessons, argumentative writing and in creation of tasks that are aligned to the CCLS and the school's instructional goals. However, professional development in instructional strategies that work best for SWD's and ELL's, and for effective collaborative team teaching, is not as well developed as other instructional strategies. As a result, teachers continue to look for suitable ways to address the special instructional needs of relevant subgroups of students, limiting their effectiveness in helping some students complete mastery of the curriculum.
  - o The school struggles to provide opportunities for teachers to develop and practice leadership beyond the role of weekly team facilitator, limiting school-wide leadership capacity building. The role of facilitator of the weekly team meetings rotates among the members of each teacher team while the assistant principal and United Federation of Teachers (UFT) teacher center specialist remain in the role of leader at each team meeting limiting the development of teachers as full leaders.
- Further enhance the systems that evaluate the effectiveness of teacher collaboration and leadership development to improve student performance. (5.4)
  - o The principal meets weekly with the assistant principal and the UFT teacher center specialist to discuss the effectiveness of the teacher teams they are assigned to lead. However, a system whereby teacher leaders from each team meet weekly with the principal to participate in instructional decision making at the school level is not yet evident, thus the support for developing teacher leaders and enhancing the practice of distributive leadership is hindered.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: THE SCHOOL FOR CLASSICS: AN ACADEMY OF THINKERS, WRITERS AND PERFORMERS</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				<b>X</b>
1..2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?				<b>X</b>
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				<b>X</b>
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				<b>X</b>
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			<b>X</b>	

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.**

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X	
1..4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?				X
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X	

**Quality Review Scoring Key**

<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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