

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

DreamYard Preparatory School

09X329

**240 East 172nd Street
Bronx, NY 10457**

Principal: Rod Bowen

Dates of review: April 2nd – 3rd, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Simeon Stolzberg

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

DreamYard Preparatory School is a high school with 340 students from 9th through 12th grade. The school population comprises 28% Black, 68% Hispanic, less than 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 83.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is effectively using the observation of classroom teaching and analysis of learning outcomes to elevate instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth for all teachers. (4.1)
 - As part of a talent management pilot program, the staff has adapted Danielson's Enhancing Professional Practice framework and created an additional domain for student impact. School leaders support teachers' development, including those new to the profession, with verbal and written feedback and next steps from frequent cycles of classroom observation and student work. They have established the goal of, at minimum, four informal observations and two formal observations over the course of the year. They also conduct frequent "walk-throughs" and intervisitations that focus on specific teaching competencies; in addition, coaches in social studies and mathematics conduct weekly observations and provide teachers with subject-specific feedback. School leaders noted their focus on implementation of professional development in classroom practice. For example, school leaders have been monitoring the use of reading and writing strategies within the history department after a network social studies specialist provided staff development in this area. Departments are also expected to review student work at least monthly using a protocol, and school leaders examine whether student work is addressing the essential questions contained in curriculum units leading to cohesion between curriculum and instruction.
- The school has developed a coherent curriculum with an emphasis on the arts, which engages a variety of learners and is aligned to State standards. (1.1)
 - School leaders described backwards planning from college readiness expectations. Assisted by the network, Using the Understanding by Design (UbD) approach, departments continue to refine and vertically integrate curriculum aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, the school has developed programs in visual arts, creative writing, dance, music and theater to engage students and deepen their understanding of core subjects. The school has deliberately used student performance data to reflect on its curriculum and revise courses and pacing. School leaders and faculty have evaluated Regents results, credit accumulation and interim assessment data to inform curriculum development. Furthermore, the extensive use of team teaching facilitates the coordination of curriculum for special education and English language learners within the general education curriculum. For example, the ESL department adapted the CCLS rubric for different levels of English language learners to ensure effective participation of all students in a recent unit. The curriculum also provides opportunities for high achievers through Advanced Placement English and Spanish classes, advanced chemistry and mathematics classes and college level courses as part of a holistic approach to rigorous learning experiences for all students.
- The school is making strategic organizational decisions to support achievement of the school's instructional goals and meeting student learning needs. (1.3)

- The school provides a variety of class types and structures to meet the needs of all students. The school offers three self-contained classes for students with disabilities as well as a number of collaborative team teaching classes (CTT) to facilitate inclusion. The school's emphasis on rigor and student responsibility for learning was evident in student work; for example, review of student writing and observation of classroom discussion demonstrated an explicit focus on supporting statements with evidence.
- The school is organized so that teams of teachers share responsibility for meeting the needs of a manageable cohort of students. School leaders have increased staff accountability for performance and used a more thoughtful hiring process to improve the quality of their faculty. They have hired a number of new teachers and created a new dean position to handle behavior issues and discipline. Department and grade team meetings are held weekly. Using the school-based option, faculty chose to provide small group instruction during lunchtime. In addition, teachers are provided with per session to offer afterschool and Saturday Regents preparation and credit recovery classes. Seniors are also identified to serve as teaching assistants in 9th and 10th grade classes. As a result, they have established a collaborative professional culture conducive to school improvement.
- The school gathers and analyzes information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level. (2.1)
 - School leaders and faculty are tracking a range of data points relevant to school goals, including Regents pass rates, credit accumulation and interim assessment results. These data sources indicate increased achievement and predict higher Regents pass rates this year. The data are disaggregated by sub-groups with attention to at-risk groups, including the lowest one-third of students and students in danger of failing; data are compared against benchmarks and last year's performance. School leaders also report an increased emphasis on cohort analysis to ensure students are on track to graduation. Data have been instrumental in shaping the school's improvement strategies, including its focus on curriculum coherence and rigor, questioning and discussion, and writing. "Action arc" documents indicate regular meetings by teams to analyze assessment results. Grade teams and departments create "impact" reports that include targeted students' performance and progress in each core subject and grade-wide initiatives. For example, analysis of U.S. and Global History Regents results identified writing as an area for improvement, and the school coordinated the History and English department to work collaboratively on this area. Department co-planning meetings are now used to develop activities based on common topics and grade papers together.
- The school monitors curriculum and instruction, and makes adjustments to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school. (5.1)
 - In addition to direct monitoring of lesson planning and classroom practices, school leaders meet regularly with team leaders to gather information about program implementation. As a result a number of changes are evident, including modification to schedules, enhanced course offerings, and increased use of team teaching. School leaders also receive written reports on their teacher team activities and progress, which informs staff development decisions. The school has also made productive use of external consultants and

network resources, which provide a valuable perspective on program design and implementation.

- The school communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and supports students to achieve them. (3.4)
 - As part of the talent management pilot program, school leaders have received professional development in leadership and evaluation of teacher performance based on the Danielson's Enhancing Professional Practice framework. The faculty acknowledged that rigor was not clearly defined in the past; but now they are using Webb's Depth of Knowledge rubric and Hess' Cognitive Rigor Matrix for professional development to frame curriculum development, lesson planning and instruction. Consequently, school leaders indicated a more consistent approach to instruction and interim assessment results that suggest they are on track to meeting their goals for increased student achievement. School leaders and staff also communicate high expectations to families, and offer opportunities for families to learn how they can prepare students for their next level. The school utilizes Skedula, an online system that allows teachers to share with parents their child's performance and communicate information about their child's behavior and progress. The school distributes a weekly "e-blast" that includes the attendance rate and "shout outs" for students and staff. The school also honors parents nominated by each grade with an appreciation dinner. As a result, student attendance and parent participation in conferences has increased.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure the delivery of rigorous instruction that consistently engages students in learning activities that promote high levels of thinking and participation by all students. (1.2)
 - The extensive use of team teaching provides significant opportunities for differentiated instruction, but the use of two adults was not always maximized. For example, in one class two adults circulated and talked across each other to individual students while other students struggled with the activity. On the other hand, a general education and ESL teacher effectively team taught a lesson, providing English language learners with effective support in accessing content. The school's priority of increasing student-centered discussion was evident, but not always effective. In one class students were asked to "pair and share," but not every student had a pair and thus some did not engage in the activity. In some classes the teachers effectively engaged most students through organized lessons, effective questioning techniques and engaging materials. In other classes, teachers only called on volunteers and did not adequately monitor other students' engagement and understanding. Some teachers had clearly designed rigorous lessons but did not scaffold them to provide access for all students. For example, one teacher spent considerable time eliciting an answer from a student about a challenging text; in the meantime, other students turned to their own writing and disengaged from the exchange. These inconsistently differentiated learning opportunities lead to uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

- Engage families in school decision-making, activities, and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class goals and expectations. (2.4)
 - School leaders and faculty provide students and families with feedback regarding student progress toward meeting school and class expectations through Skedula, six report cards per year and by hosting parent-teacher conferences twice per year. Parents indicated that they are well-informed about their child's progress and opportunities. School leaders offer some opportunities for families to participate in school decision-making and important school activities. The school has a parent association and hosts events to recognize students and parents, such as a parent appreciation dinner. Nevertheless, while school leaders are receptive to parent input, they acknowledge that parent involvement has been limited. The parent association just elected new officers and is preparing for next year with the goal of increasing parent engagement.
- Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies. (5.4)
 - School leaders have provided distributed leadership opportunities to teachers by appointing grade and department team leaders who share their vision and support the professional culture they are building. While the functioning of the teams has improved as a result of clear expectations, strong team leaders, and the use of protocols; the efficacy of each team varies limiting the effectiveness of individual teams to work collaboratively on problem-solving.
- Enhance professional development that promotes reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes. (4.3)
 - Professional learning opportunities at the school are purposeful, consistently differentiated and aligned with school goals and curricula, including the work of involving all students in the CCLS tasks. The school has prioritized the rigor of questioning and discussion this year and provided specific training in these areas, including use of Webb's Depth of Knowledge rubric and Hess' Cognitive Rigor Matrix. School leaders and consultants have both subsequently focused their observations on implementation in classroom practice. Staff has also had opportunities to participate in relevant external trainings and participated in review of student work with other schools known for high performance. The school also benefits from its network, which has provided ongoing guidance in its school improvement efforts. School leaders recognize that the skill levels of teachers vary and acknowledge that, despite professional development, not all teachers have adopted shared reflection practices limiting the consistent development of effective instructional practice.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: DreamYard Preparatory School	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
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?		X		
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?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
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.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
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?			X	
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?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
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.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
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?			X	
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?			X	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			X	

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				
4.4 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							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed