

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

School for Democracy and Leadership

Secondary School K533

600 Kingston Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11203

Principal: James Olearchik

Dates of review: Feb 25-26, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Monique Darrisaw-Akil

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

School for Democracy and Leadership is a Secondary School with 406 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 89% Black, 8% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 83.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school community is in the process of establishing and supporting a culture for learning by setting high expectations for staff and students. (3.4)
 - School leaders cultivate a culture of high expectations for students and staff that is evidenced in its positive school tone, classroom visits and discussions with students and families. They align staff work to school goals in the professional development plans and teacher team meetings. One example of this alignment is to the school's goals that each teacher will design and execute two Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned units of study, and in the school's professional development plans topics address creating topics, essential questions and enduring understandings in CCLS units of study. In addition, school leaders review curriculum maps monthly and discuss lesson plans with teachers once a week in planning partner meetings. Teachers are expected to record interventions for students in the school's online data system; conference notes recorded in this system provide summaries of the topics discussed with individual students and the students' next steps. Teachers are also expected to conference with school leaders bi-weekly regarding supports for struggling students and record their findings on an "Academic Review" worksheet. Teachers report that they must share with school leaders how their instructional plans are aligned to the CCLS, thus fostering accountability for meeting the school's high expectations for teaching.
 - Administration has explicitly set a goal of implementing new initiatives to further engage students and families in order to increase academic success. To support that goal, parents receive feedback about student progress through bi-weekly progress reports that are mailed home, telephone calls, text messages and advisor outreach. The school has also developed a new parent handbook to inform parents of school-wide expectations and policies. Additionally, school leaders are in the process of creating structures to address attendance and lateness school-wide. These actions communicate high expectations and help build a school culture where students, parents and staff know what is expected of them.
- School leaders make effective decisions about the use of time and resources in order to promote student learning. (1.3)
 - The school's partnership with the community-based organization, CAMBA, has resulted in students and families gaining increased access to college and careers. One of the school's goals, as stated in its comprehensive education plan, is to "implement at least one new program and continue to expand existing programs to further engage students and families in order to increase academic success." School leaders collaborate with CAMBA to develop programs to allow students to take college-level coursework. Both parents and students praised the work of CAMBA, citing the many opportunities it provides to students through its after-school programs, college tours and course offerings at Brooklyn College. Additionally, the use of *Skedula*, an on-line grading system, is increasing transparency about student progress and facilitating

communication between teachers and families. Teachers use *Skedula* to record student progress and interventions while staff mail home monthly student progress reports based on the reports generated from the program. The addition of on-line courses, course extensions for under-credited students and new elective options promote student learning and engagement. This year school leaders created one-year and two-year course options for Algebra I and the Living Environment so that struggling learners can have more time and additional support in preparing for Regents examinations. The school now offers a wider selection of elective courses in the arts and in political science. Additionally, the school has increased the number of special education licensed teachers per grade in order to provide greater support for students with disabilities. School leaders have also decreased allocations for administrative support staff in order to hire more instructional staff. Finally, school leaders have created time at least twice a week for teachers to meet during the school day, thus promoting opportunities for staff to collaborate and plan together. During teacher team meetings, teachers work together to plan tasks and analyze student work and assessment data. As a result of collaborative planning, students are engaged in mastery performance tasks such as in Living Environment class where students designed an ecosystem which describes the relationships between the organisms within the ecosystem, made a hypothesis about the survival of the organisms based on a sample problem and devised a plan to reduce the effects of disturbance on the ecosystem. These effective decisions made by school leaders have resulted in increased engagement of students and increased opportunities for students to be immersed in meaningful work.

- The principal and other administrators have created opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative teacher teams that meet regularly to plan curriculum, assessment and address student learning needs. (4.2)
 - Teacher teams meet in a variety of configurations including grade team meetings, departmental meetings and “Planning Partners” groupings. “Planning Partners” is the new structure implemented this year to allow teachers to meet with a partner or a small group, such as collaborative team teaching partners, department teachers and mentoring teachers, around a specified area of focus. During these meetings, teachers analyze student work, develop mastery projects and plan for the integration of the CCLS. Teacher teams use a *Student Work Analysis Worksheet*, which is aligned to the CCLS, to record findings about student work and to identify implications for subsequent instructional planning and preparation. Teacher meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to collaborate and provide critical feedback about each other’s practice. For example, during one planning partner meeting, a mentor teacher worked with a new teacher to provide feedback on a learning task. Using a protocol, the new teacher described the task and its assessment. The mentor teacher asked some reflective questions and the new teacher realized that task he assigned did not require students to use evidence. This teacher, along with other new teachers, shared that they feel supported because of the individual support they receive from their planning partner. In addition to “Planning Partner” meetings, grade teams meet to address the needs of shared students on a grade. One of the teams selected for inquiry a subgroup of students who are failing all of their classes despite attending school every day. During the grade team meeting the teachers identified some of the possible reasons for failure

and developed targeted supports, such as behavior plans, student conferences and reading support strategies for those students. These structured learning opportunities promote the use of inquiry among the school staff and strengthen the instructional collaboration of teachers.

- School leaders have created opportunities for distributed leadership so that teachers have a voice in key decision-making. Teacher leaders participate in the instructional cabinet, which plans curriculum adoption and professional development. Teacher leaders also facilitate teacher team meetings, set agendas and engage in school-wide planning with the school's administrators. School leaders work with teacher leaders to analyze units of study, plan for CCLS integration, develop mastery tasks, unpack bundles posted on the New York City Department of Education's Common Core library in order to set expectations for student learning across the school. Additionally, school leaders also meet regularly with the student council to solicit ideas and feedback about the school's progress. These distributive leadership structures facilitate communication among constituencies and provide opportunities for various members of the school community to share in decision-making.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop pedagogy that is informed by a shared research-based framework so that student performance improves school-wide and all subgroups are better supported to create meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Though in most classes students worked in small groups, independently or in pairs, there was inconsistent use of common routines, scaffolds or differentiated lessons. There were also inconsistencies in the degrees of rigor students experience in their classes. There were some classes in which students were engaged in higher order thinking while in other classes teachers asked questions that simply required students to recall information, restate or summarize, with few opportunities for students to analyze text or demonstrate their thinking. For example, in the United States Government and History class, students read a variety of primary source documents to discuss and analyze their meaning. The teacher introduced students to academic vocabulary during the lesson by using words such as "satire", "assimilation" and "nativism". Additionally, in the grade 7 math class, students worked on a performance-based task that required students to explore the relationships between two different variables and represent that relationship graphically and in an equation. In the Conflict and Controversy class, students were asked to consider nature versus nurture and take a position based on the articles provided. However, in other classes students were not engaged in reading or discussing challenging texts. For instance, in some classes, teachers accepted one-word responses from students, students were not encouraged to ground their evidence in the text or explain their thinking. Additionally, in one class a student with disability could not articulate the goal of the lesson and could not explain the task he was engaged in. Overall, there were few checks for understanding across classrooms. This lack of consistency in teaching practice leads to missed opportunities for all learners to be meaningfully engaged in learning.

- Implement a rigorous curriculum is aligned to the CCLS and that engages all learners in challenging tasks that require higher order thinking. (1.1)
 - School leaders and staff have identified key standards to focus on that are aligned to the CCLS. The school has chosen using text-based evidence in written arguments as an area of focus in literacy and reasoning in math. The integration of mastery tasks is a promising practice; however, there was inconsistent evidence of rigorous, higher order thinking tasks across classes. Lesson plans were not clearly aligned to the school's selected CCLS. Essential questions are present in unit plans but it is not clear that these questions drive the lessons across classrooms. Instructional plans inconsistently provided multiple entry points for diverse learners. Thus, there are limited opportunities for all students to be thoughtfully engaged in meaningful tasks.
 - Teachers regularly engage in planning curriculum and tasks aligned to standards and the instructional shifts. Looking at data is an embedded practice in the school community; teachers and school leaders look at credit accumulation, course pass rates and grade team data as a faculty to inform school-wide planning. Although teachers regularly look at student performance data in planning partner meetings and in professional development, there is little evidence that the analysis of the data is used to revise tasks and curricula. Additionally, while teachers analyze student performance data, the focus of the analysis is developing interventions for individual students. For example, when using the *Looking at Students' Thinking and Surfacing Gaps* template, teachers explored the gaps between desired learning goals and student work and then discussed the implications for teacher practice in addressing the needs of the individual students. There was little evidence that teachers are consistently identifying trends in the performance of groups of students, thus their ability to refine tasks to meet the needs of diverse learners is limited.
- Establish systems to align curricula with assessment so that instructional decisions can be revised based on student learning needs. (2.2)
 - Teachers use common assessments to assess student progress toward school goals. For example, teachers administer diagnostic tests at the beginning of the school year, common midterms and common periodic assessments at the end of each marking period. School faculty analyze the results of the assessment data in faculty meetings and in planning partner meetings. However, teachers across the school have yet to begin engaging in the practice of adjusting curriculum as a result of the student performance data. The inconsistent use of assessment data to adjust curriculum and instruction prohibits school faculty from effectively meeting the learning needs of all students.
 - Teachers use exit slips, turn and talk strategies and individual student conferencing to conduct on-going checks for understanding. Additionally, teachers use rubrics across the school to assess student work and check for understanding. However, some rubrics were not fully aligned to school-selected focus standards. For example, one rubric used for a writing assignment in science did not require students to use text to support their answers. While in some classes, students had access to

rubrics, there was little evidence that students use rubrics to assess their own work, thus, limiting student opportunities to track their own progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: School for Democracy and Leadership	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
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?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		X					
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
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?		X					
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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					
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?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed