

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

John Dewey

High School 540

**50 Avenue X
Brooklyn
NY 11223**

Principal: Kathleen Elvin

Dates of review: May 29 – 31, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

John Dewey is a high school with 1893 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 26% Black, 20% Hispanic, 12% White, and 42% Asian students. The student body includes 25% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 88.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Instructional coherence across grades and subject areas that is reflected in standards-aligned curricula emphasizes higher order thinking and rigorous tasks to cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
 - Common-Core-aligned, college-preparatory curricula are developed across grades and subjects with a lens on vertical alignment in subjects such as English language arts (ELA) that build on topics year-to-year. In addition, John Dewey is noted for its academies such as Academy of Finance and Computer Science Institute for which curricula are tailored to the specific State requirements, and approval for a pre-med program is pending. Several advanced placement courses are offered to encourage students to aim for an Advanced Regents' diploma. In response to continued item analyses of Regents' exam results across subjects, especially for English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD), the school emphasizes speaking, writing, and vocabulary development in all units of study. Big Ideas and Essential Questions frame each unit and provide a global perspective on student learning that transcends student thinking to the college level. Literacy content and skills are mapped across the year and are built upon each other from grade-to-grade as comprehending expository and argumentative text complexity increases. Furthermore, English as a second language (ESL) and beginner ESL Global companion curricula are developed using a backward design model and including specific scaffolding techniques to reinforce skills necessary for student success on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), Regents exams, and lifelong language acquisition. Formative tasks are aligned to each topic in a unit and final performance tasks at the end of each unit provide an assessment to determine continued support in the next unit. These tasks include writing pieces such as argumentative and critical lens essays to ultimately prepare all learners for college and beyond. As a result, these efforts accelerate continued student progress toward closing the achievement gap as evident in a 10% increase projected for high school diplomas for special education students including a significant shift from Individual Education Plan diplomas to Regents diplomas.
 - An "Analysis of Uniform Assessments and Subsequent Adjustments in Instructional Practice" is a regular part of curriculum binders. For each performance assessment, a detailed summary captures a description and intention of the assessment, observations of results that identify students' strengths and deficits, and subsequent adjustments to inform curricula and instruction. For example, through this process the science team noted that students had difficulty making inferences when reading passages to find answers with content specific to the topic of evolution. The team revised curricula and tasks to teach students how this comprehension skill and key ideas around evolution could be revisited in future lessons and units. This process, of reinforcing content knowledge and skill building, is evident across subjects and grades, thus elevating the level of cognitive engagement for all students especially ELLs. The impact is evident in cohort Regents exam data that reveal improvements from August 2012 to January 2013. For example, the 2013 cohort percent passing rate in English improved by 3.3% from 74.0% to 77.3% while Integrated Algebra increased by 4.0% from 80.8% to 84.8%.

- The principal is effectively redirecting and refocusing the school by making organizational decisions that support instructional goals and action plans through a distributive team leadership model with a lens on student achievement. (1.3)
 - Since there is a large, diverse population of ELL students at John Dewey, a Title III grant this year was used to provide a series of five monthly, two-hour professional development sessions from February to June. These sessions, led by an assistant principal and teacher, cover strategies and methodologies for meeting the needs of ELLs in all subjects. Additionally, several partnerships not only support the academies that John Dewey is known for, but also lend a new dimension to learning for many other students. For example, Kaiser Park offers students and staff experiences with environmental work and construction of the school's underwater robot with video capabilities to examine the ecology of the neighboring Coney Island Creek. In addition, the Council for Unity provides a unique curriculum that fosters self-esteem, leadership, and team building, and provides the skills necessary for the creation and maintaining of quality relationships among students and adults. Lastly, the number of assistant principals was reduced this year and roles and responsibilities of those still assigned were redefined to effectively support teachers across grades and departments and in turn, teachers effectively supporting students resulting in more meaningful work products.
 - Upon assuming leadership of the school in the Spring of last year, the principal met with all stakeholders to understand where the greatest changes needed to be made in response to the Progress Report. All students are now benefitting from exposure to a college-going mindset by visiting colleges, and partaking in a college lesson series in English classes that covers salient topics such as the application process and the traits of a good college essay. Additionally, a reorganization of grades into houses increased community cohesion among students and enabled grade level teachers to work more closely together with their own house's students. Guidance counselors who are assigned to houses this year, work along with new teacher-assigned positions of grade advisor and house leader and assistant principal to focus their support on students in grade cohorts. As a true testimony to the worth of this structure, one twelfth grade student that is part of the Senior House this year willingly admits that she was not attending class last year and failing subjects. She is now on track to graduate in June having caught up with diploma requirements due to smaller class sizes, individual teacher support, and weekly student-to-student group sessions that she claims "...gave us feedback and pushed me to do it (complete high school)." She declared, "If we didn't have Senior House, I don't think we would graduate." Furthermore, last year's "free bands", that is, free periods when students could walk the halls, go outside, and not attend class were replaced by full academic programs completely aligned to student's individual course requirements and credit and Regents needs to bring them back on track for graduation with Regents diplomas or higher. Furthermore, in response to periodic item analyses of various content assessments, the staff mobilizes to offer extensive tutoring programs, one of which is referred to as the Twilight Tutoring. Students are invited to attend a series of extensive Regents review sessions from 3:30 PM to 6:30 PM and they are served dinner following each review session. These structures are meeting the both personal and academic needs of all students, particularly lower achievers by fully engaging students in learning experiences thereby significantly reducing the suspension rate this year by 43% over last year.
- Structures for observation of classroom teaching and subsequent support to teachers promote professional growth, reflection, and elevate instructional practices. (4.1)

- The school's implementation of the Danielson Framework provides a common language for good teacher practices for both school leaders and teachers. While the school is focusing on building culture, questioning and discussion, assessment for learning, and student engagement, other competencies are addressed as needed. Individualized teacher observation folders include a log of formal observations and of several short, frequent visits to classrooms with immediate feedback to support teachers with ongoing reflection about strategies that lead to verbal exchange of ideas between school leaders and teachers. These conversations include a review of class data, failure rate, and subsequent support to specific students, especially ELLs. In addition to observations by assistant principals, the principal makes it a point to visit every teacher either with an assistant principal or alone. Teachers are invited to share best practices such as one math teacher who was asked to model for the rest of the department how he conducts a series of "speed quizzes" to assess and reinforce basic concepts and vocabulary that students will need for the Regents exam. New teachers, supported through these frequent visits and feedback, are provided one-on-one professional development. Some are invited to visit classrooms with school leaders and/or visit an assistant principal's classroom as a next step to strengthen their pedagogy. As a result, teachers are making progress along the Danielson continuum. (a, b)
- Teachers are engaged in professional collaborations making decisions that are intended to improve student progress and teacher practice across grades and subject areas. (4.2)
 - Structured professional collaboration by teams is a high priority this year with common planning time scheduled for teacher-team work periods four through eight on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday each week. Several configurations of teams such as department and grade including English as a second language (ESL) and Instructional Support Services (ISS), meet this year to engage in professional activities such as analyzing student data, planning lessons and curricula, and reviewing student work. Department or house assistant principals are an integral part of these teams as teachers work together on sharpening their pedagogical skills to help students succeed. Distributive leadership is evolving through the rotation of teachers as team facilitator and recorder, setting agendas, and determining next steps for planning and adjustments to curriculum and instruction. For example, the ESL team, comprised of three ESL teachers and an assistant principal, discussed the progress of low and intermediate ELL students, and how to bring uniformity to and scaffold the final performance task involving a critical lens essay. The tenth grade ELA used a protocol to review four student critical lens essays and subsequently conduct an assessment analysis that surfaced student strengths and gaps in learning. The follow-up conversation included sharing some strategies that might address the gaps. This diligent dialogue and process across teams that is evolving this year as inquiry is a comparatively new practice and is empowering teachers to gain traction in building capacity in creating opportunities to identify potentially powerful, shared pedagogical shifts to effect improvements for wider groups of students. Consequently, by sharing strategies including developing lesson plans and curricula, teams are making a positive impact on strengthening the instructional core and improving Regents results and graduation rates.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop rigorous teaching practices across all subjects and grades and ensure that there are multiple entry points into the curriculum so that all students, especially ELL and special education students, make progress. (1.2)

- Most teachers support student academic success through planning lessons with rigorous content, clear objectives, and procedures that meet the needs of each student such as modeling, group work, and opportunities for peer discussion. However, when tailoring pedagogy to align with competencies in the Danielson framework, especially around questioning and discussion, pedagogical proficiency varies. Higher-level questions and explicitly teaching students how to engage in a healthy discourse with their peers is not evident in all classrooms. For example, in one Living Environment class of ELL students the teacher modeled how to effectively ‘unpack’ a passage in a Regent task and respond accurately to what was being asked by annotating the text while projecting his work on the SMARTboard. As he read he thought aloud and noted, “I am not focusing on this scientific term (*Heteropsylla spinulosa* insect) because I want to get the main idea of this passage.” In another classroom, seven groups of students took ownership of the math as they debated with each other deciding on the best methods for solving a geometrical graphing problem. The teacher provided a “Transformation Rubric Sheet” as a support during their group work and then took this scaffold away when they completed an exit slip to assess their learning. However, in other classrooms, students are reluctant to engage in dialogue with their group members regarding the task and the lesson becomes a teacher-to-student series of questions with little or no wait time for students to think, and teacher-led explanations overshadow opportunities for student discourse. Furthermore, task directions or prompts for student talk are not always explicit, generating student confusion. Although the principal recognizes gaps in the delivery of instruction, currently inconsistent pedagogical practices contributes to missed opportunities for all students to demonstrate higher order thinking necessary to meet or exceed the demanding Common Core performance standards.
- Strengthen assessment practices so that feedback loops and grading policies enable students to take ownership of their learning and achievement by developing a sense of efficacy to be successful in college and career. (2.2)
 - As part of Regent review this time of year, in two classrooms visited, students were engaged in learning how to use a Regents-based rubric to grade sample writing pieces and subsequently comprehend how ‘good is good enough’ in their own essay writing on Regents exams. However, while the school is developing performance tasks to assess student mastery, rubrics that measure the outcomes on these tasks are not always clearly understood or internalized by students. Although teachers receive valuable feedback through the use of rubrics, the written feedback by some teachers to students is sketchy as it only entails circling categories on the rubric and giving a grade matched to the rubric on the student work. This became evident when interviewing students in classrooms and during a small student group meeting when students discussed their work. This is compounded by time not given to students to develop the skill of self-assessment during classroom lessons, in addition to some teachers who do not take the time to provide accurate feedback to push student thinking or accurately check for understanding when they move from group to group. Furthermore, grading policies at the school are not yet consistent. Students have different understandings of the grading policies from one another and from subject to subject, and at times different from the written policies for each subject. As a result, teachers are not consistently making effective ‘on the spot’ adjustments and students are not able to definitively speak of their strengths and next steps to improve their work products and achieve across subjects.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: John Dewey	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