Quality Review Report

2012-2013

Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology

High School 438

500 East Fordham Road
Bronx
NY 10458

Principal: Mary Ann Tucker

Dates of review: April 18 - 19, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology is a high school with 451 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 28% Black, 68% Hispanic, 3% Asian and 1% White students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 62% of the students enrolled and girls account for 38%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 82.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- All members of the school community collaborate effectively to create a safe and nurturing environment that provides students and adults with academic and social-emotional experiences that support their learning. (1.4)
    - Guidance counselors collaborate with a dean and two social workers to provide staff and students on each grade level with training in behavior management, Respect for All, and other social emotional learning topics, including cyber-bullying strategies. Students report that the principal and staff maintain an open door policy that allows them to offer suggestions or share in initiatives for school improvement. There are also town hall meetings and a student-produced newsletter, both which give voice to students concerns and celebrate students' input in school decision-making. For example, students take responsibility for a morning breakfast and tutoring program that helps with social as well as academic needs, thus benefiting students with an inclusive culture where adults encourage and value their contributions.
    - Teachers team up with each other and partner with other adults to provide extra tutoring and other intervention services to support student learning. A school support team comprised of administrators, guidance counselors, and the parent coordinator, meet weekly to address academic as well as social emotional needs of students and schedule conferences as needed for parents of students who are performing poorly or are chronically late or absent. The school offers classes that help parents understand their children's learning needs and connects them to resources that build their capacity as home-school partners. Through a Life Center partnership, the school educates families about healthy meals and families receive computer literacy training in the school's computer lab, which is open to them afterschool during the week and on Saturdays. As a result, the school's culture is one that generates growth in adult and student academic and personal behaviors that support learning.
- School leaders and staff utilize a research-based framework that ensures that all teachers receive ongoing feedback to promote professional growth and improve student outcomes. (4.1)
    - Using Excel Tracker for Teacher Observations, administrators conduct formal and informal observations as well as frequent walkthroughs to deepen the work of improving teacher quality. Following the observations and walkthroughs, administrators share feedback with each other, prior to meeting with the teachers, so that teacher performance ratings are normed, leading to consistent and coherent feedback to teachers, inclusive of next steps to align their instructional practice with the CCLS. There are performance goals for all students and feedback to teachers incorporate data from student work that shows how students are performing in relation to those goals, so that teachers can self-assess and modify their practice as needed to improve student performance on tasks. The observation tracking system captures feedback to teachers, including new teachers, for whom there are professional development plans linked to individual learning goals and action plans for each of those teachers. As a result, teachers report that

they receive feedback that is indicative of crucial next steps for enhancing their instructional practice, especially with regard to differentiating instruction to accommodate students' diverse needs, increasing rigor in tasks, and improving questioning to support higher order thinking by all students.

- School administrators use the Danielson Framework for effective teaching, as they gather low inference data from observations and meet with teachers to provide immediate feedback regarding assessment of their lessons. Administrators analyze teacher's observation reports and work with teachers to analyze areas of weakness and strengths in order to improve rigor in lesson tasks and ensure high levels of student engagement in learning. The school-based coach meets with targeted teachers to review their needs as well as the needs of their students and to support implementation of instructional strategies that address the goals reflected in the feedback from administrators. Based on rounds of observations that include three short (15-20 minutes) Teacher Intensive visits, and at least one formal observation for each teacher to date, teachers stated that the feedback they receive is explicit in illuminating a path to improvement in their pedagogy. They receive additional feedback from each subsequent round of observations to determine the extent to which improvement is noted in each of the competencies across the common teaching framework. As a result, administrators consistently provide feedback that informs teacher development activities, resulting in professional growth of teachers.

- School leaders and faculty analyze assessments to determine students' academic strengths and needs, as well as plan interventions and implement instructional strategies that insure improvement in achievement by all learners. (2.2)

  - Across classrooms, teachers and students use rubrics and grading policies that reflect the expectations of the CCLS to drive assessment of student performance. In some classrooms there are teacher-made and task-specific rubrics linked to student performance on unit tasks. Lesson plans show reference to technology-based intervention programs such as Reading Horizon and Plato that provide data informing the design of additional assessment tasks linked to curriculum maps. Through whole class discussions and individual conferences with students, teachers follow up with specific feedback that highlights students' achievements and learning needs. As a result, teachers are adept in using assessment tools to provide effective feedback to students and other staff, regarding next steps for improving students' mastery of standards.

  - Common assessments in all core content areas determine students' progress towards goals. In addition, individuals, as well as teams of teachers analyze data from formative and summative assessments, including Acuity periodic assessments and web-based tools such as Achieve 3000 and Castle Learning, to aggregate sufficient data across core content areas. School leaders and teachers use the data to track students' progress and have clear methods of aligning performance outcomes with targeted goals, thus supporting instructional and curricula modifications that enhance students' success in attaining learning goals, as evidenced by ongoing improvement in students' performance in English language arts and math.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine the development of curricula across content areas to reflect rigorous performance tasks that are aligned with CCLS, leading to college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
    - The principal and staff engage in aligning curricula to CCLS and designing units of instruction to implement the instructional shifts in literacy and math. The use of web based programs such as the Common Core library, Engage New York, and Atlas Rubicon, help to accelerate the development of customized curriculum units and lessons that reflect the CCLS, especially in English language arts and math, by providing all teachers with online access to publisher created materials that are already aligned to the CCLS. However, student work samples on bulletin boards and in students' work folders showed limited evidence of tasks linked to the instructional shifts. In addition, teachers noted that most of the publisher created materials available to them target literacy and math instruction intensively but do not show adequate focus on performance tasks for other core areas. As a result, students have limited exposure to varied and in-depth learning experiences that are grounded in the demands of the CCLS across content areas to ensure their readiness for college and beyond.
    - Teachers state that they review unit plans from the Common Core bundles and adapt their plans as needed to provide effective instruction for their classes. Some lesson plans show that there are essential questions to guide instruction in core content areas and support learning about a common topic. Some teachers incorporate flexible grouping of students into their plans to facilitate interventions and allow students to complete differentiated tasks. However, academic tasks are not consistently rigorous and some lesson plans do not reflect attention to the needs of diverse learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities. For example, in a lesson plan for a group of students with disabilities, the task was for students to note details from an article they were reading. In a second classroom, a homework task required students to write a paragraph after researching a topic. As a result, students lack consistent exposure to curricula with academic tasks that promote the high levels of thinking that are essential in advancing their learning.
- Strengthen teacher practice to incorporate effective questioning and challenging tasks that foster deep thinking and active participation of all students in activities that accelerate their learning. (1.2)
    - Across the school, lessons show deliberate and constant focus on questioning to support whole class, individual and small group discussion of lesson topics and texts. Through the administration of a Learning Style survey, flexible grouping, and differentiated tasks, teachers focus on creating entry points for learning by all students and conference with them to address learning needs. However, in some classrooms, especially those with English language learners and students with disabilities, questions do not push students' thinking and tasks are of low demand. For example, in one classroom the task was for students to read an excerpt of text and give details to answer a few low level questions. As a result, teaching practices do not meet the needs of all learners nor consistently challenge them to produce work that involves higher order thinking.

- Discussions in the majority of classes engage students in learning as they share thinking and ideas to complete group tasks. Teachers provide prompts in questioning students about tasks done or texts read and students take turns responding. However, in some classrooms students are not invited to comment on responses given by peers and for the most part, discussions are teacher dominated and do not promote participation by all students. Students are mostly compliant and sit quietly listening to the teacher and a few peers who volunteer responses. As a result, all students do not participate actively in learning activities and some complete written tasks only minimally, with little evidence of focused thinking.

- Refine teacher teamwork to expand collaborations that promote increased teacher capacity in designing rigorous CCLS aligned units of instruction to support high levels of student achievement across content areas. (4.2)

  - Teachers are grouped across teams such as English as a second language, special education, English language arts, math, social studies, science, and "Lowest Third," to promote focused inquiry based discussions of students' needs and successes across grades and content areas. Teams work with consultants from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Fordham University, and the network, to review curriculum maps, develop pacing calendars, and design learning tasks, to focus on what students need to know. They discuss individual students, patterns and trends in learning related to a given unit, topic or assessment, and take turns sharing ideas for improvement in their practice and student mastery of learning goals. However, with teams that mostly focus on English language arts and math curricula, the alignment of instruction with CCLS in other core disciplines is still a work in progress. Consequently, teacher teamwork to support full attainment of instructional goals is hampered by the uneven focus on CCLS aligned curricula across all content areas.

  - Coaches and other teacher leaders have the opportunity to shadow school leaders to develop their skills in looking at the school as a whole, make professional development decisions, and expand distributive leadership roles across the school. Further, by working with consultants and network specialists, grade leaders and other team leaders, including three lead teachers, are empowered to share best practices with other staff and take responsibility for turnkeying information at the school level. All teachers participate in network professional development activities and report involvement in evaluating curriculum materials and identifying resources to support the school's goals for improving student achievement. However, with many teachers on multiple teams, the effectiveness of team discussions is constrained by lack of time for in-depth attention to high leverage learning goals in areas of priority identified by school data. As a result, the impact of teacher leadership on schoolwide decision-making for improved student achievement is still in the emergent phase.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

Fordham Leadership Academy for Business &Technology	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		
Instructional Core				
To what extent does the school regularly…	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				
To what extent does the school …	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				
To what extent does the school …	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