



Quality Review Report 2013-2014

School for Democracy and Leadership

Middle-High School 533

**600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: James Olearchik

Dates of review: April 9 - 10, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

School for Democracy and Leadership is a middle-high school with 334 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 87% Black, 8% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% American Indian and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 83.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- All staff work collaboratively to refine curricula across content areas, in alignment to Common Core and related content standards, to ensure that all students consistently have access to cognitively engaging tasks. (1.1)
 - Based on a common template, curriculum maps for all content areas show unit topics, big ideas, targeted standards, skills, source texts and documents, essential questions, assessments, and tasks that reflect Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the instructional shifts, thus providing an alignment of all content area curricula to their respective standards. Additionally, a curriculum binder contains detailed CCLS aligned units and tasks with annotations to show revisions from past units, along with modifications of lessons by teacher teams, thus evidencing on-going alignment of curricula to standards and assessments. In addition, the school adopted the Code X program for English Language Arts and CMP3 Math for the middle school to ensure use of materials aligned to CCLS. For the high school students there are course descriptions, unit maps, and pacing guides that show a focus on tasks that require close reading of complex texts to support writing activities aligned to CCLS and Regents' standards. A schoolwide instructional focus on the use of text-based evidence in arguments, drives the design of tasks in all content areas, leading to instructional coherence and multiple opportunities to promote college and career readiness for all students.
 - Administrators, network specialists, and teacher leaders, facilitate planning sessions that focus on using student work and data to craft tasks that address all students' needs in all classes. Specifically, analysis of data from student baseline assessments and work samples informed teachers of needed adjustments to the curricula, which led to an instructional focus on the infusion of literacy based activities in all disciplines. In addition, unit plans offer all students access to cognitively engaging tasks across classrooms, by incorporating planning around student work, thus meeting the needs of diverse learners. For example, a literacy task required students to apply learning from their reading of Shakespeare's *Othello* to create an argumentative essay in response to the essential question, "How do the ideas of jealousy and revenge still affect the world today?" Similarly, a math task offered students opportunities to experiment with numbers to respond to the question, "How can you graphically determine the solution to a system of equations?" Thus across classrooms, CCLS aligned curricula and tasks are designed to transmit lesson concepts in an engaging way to all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners.
- School leaders and faculty engage in meaningful goal setting, with all members of the school community participating in decision-making and progress monitoring to ensure ongoing school improvement. (3.1)

- School teams study a wide range of data, leading to the generating of a list of goals that are outlined in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan and other documents. They reflect the school's belief that use of consistent research-based schoolwide instructional practices, which involve students in a broad range of engaging and rigorous learning activities, will foster students' academic achievement and college readiness. Goals include increasing attendance rate, decreasing incidents of misconduct, and increasing the rate of credit accumulation by the high school students, by June 2014. Goals also target having all teachers participate in a minimum of 15 professional development sessions related to targeted domains of the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching, to ensure that all teachers demonstrate improvements in these domains, by June 2014. Goals are tracked in a variety of ways, including a review of observation data, lesson artifacts, and student scholarship reports, leading to adjustments that are directly linked to the acceleration of student learning. For teachers, adjustments include increased participation in one-to-one conferences with administrators, and additional targeted intervisitations to strengthen pedagogy. For students, adjustments include after school and Saturday academic intervention programs, tutoring to improve preparation for State assessments, and completion of course extension tasks related to any course that a student fails. These adjustments support ongoing school improvement, while enhancing students' academic and social emotional development, as students develop accountability for their learning, as evidenced by improved course pass rates for both the high and middle level students as well as an improved rate of credit accumulation for the high school students.

- Parents reported that they regularly collaborate with administrators in school level goal setting through monthly Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings, while school staff and student council representatives stated that they meet with administrators at designated times to provide input. School staff noted that there is shared decision-making related to school goals that target additional support for struggling students and plans for additional elective courses for all students. Parents confirmed their input in discussions to secure and expend funds for instructional initiatives, including the purchase of technology equipment and other resources to support school improvement. Students stated that peer leaders from the Senior Council participate in decision-making by conducting surveys schoolwide, to help determine electives, afterschool activities, and trips. School documents, including professional development records and minutes of PTA and SLT meetings, combine to provide evidence of engagement of all school community members in school-wide decision-making. Thus, goal setting and decision-making, based on school data, are well informed by regular communication with and input from all constituent groups, who help to develop next steps for school improvement initiatives throughout the school year.

- Administrators effectively communicate and promote high expectations to staff, students, and families, with multiple supports for attaining them, resulting in student progress towards college and career readiness. (3.4)
 - Interviews of selected teachers indicate that through team discussions at faculty conferences, one-to-one meetings, bulletins, memos, and a school

handbook, school leaders ensure that all staff members are fully informed about expectations related to instruction, professional development, and many other areas of school operations. In addition, administrators use the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching to reinforce some of those expectations, with all teachers receiving professional development support to improve their mastery of competencies such as effective questioning and scaffolding instruction, thus expanding their capacity to deliver instruction that supports all students in meeting high expectations. Administrators also meet regularly with teachers to provide feedback on lessons and engage them in reviews of student portfolios, class data, and their own written self-assessment, so that all teachers are well aware of the high expectations for their teaching and learning. Through these mechanisms, administrators provide targeted and individualized supports for all staff, resulting in shared accountability around student learning.

- Parents report that staff members invite them to participate in creating learning goals for their children, and guidance counselors meet with them to review topics such as graduation requirements, career options, college admissions, application steps, financial aid, scholarships, as well as college level courses available to their children. Communication tools such as letters, flyers, a weekly newsletter, and postings on the school's own website, keep families up-to-date on school events, such as upcoming college tours, internships, service learning, and extracurricular activities, thus empowering them to help their children take advantage of the many activities that support college and career readiness. In addition, the Skedula online data system keeps all families informed about student performance, fostering parent communication with teachers about their children's progress and any needed follow-up to support learning. Through these supports, the school's partnership with families has contributed to students' progress towards college and career readiness, as evidenced by the many students participating in the school's "Access to Careers" and/or taking college level courses through the school's "Leading to College" partnership program with Brooklyn College.
- School leaders support teacher development through frequent observations and feedback that result in ongoing refinement of instructional practices throughout the school. (4.1)
 - The principal and assistant principal often conduct formal and informal classroom visits together, in order to norm their understanding of individual teacher's needs and strengths. A review of observation reports shows that administrators provide detailed next steps for teachers to improve their pedagogy across competencies such as engaging students in learning, implementing effective questioning strategies, and designing a student centered culture for learning. New teachers receive additional feedback on their performance from mentors. School leaders also target teachers' areas of need based on findings from student work and data. For example, based on an analysis of students' writing samples from performance tasks, the principal determined that some teachers needed additional support in designing rigorous tasks and offered next steps. Thus, all teachers are constantly provided with feedback that supports strengthening their pedagogy.
 - To support individual teacher's understanding of next steps for growth, the principal recommends specific videos on ARIS Learn. Further,

administrators share feedback with a grant-funded leadership coach and school-based content area coaches who are charged to offer additional support, thus ensuring immediate follow up on recommended next steps. Teachers also reported that they seek out administrative support and are provided with mentoring, inter-visitations, and other targeted professional development to address areas of concern outlined in observation reports from their supervisor or identified by the teachers in their own written self-assessment document. To accurately monitor teacher effectiveness, administrators track teacher growth through reviews of data from the Advance teacher evaluation portal, which shows ratings of each teacher across initial and subsequent observations relative to the same competencies of the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching. For example, the data showed that several teachers who were initially rated as “ineffective” in “questioning” and provided with next steps for improvement, were rated as “effective” on subsequent observations of their lesson. As a result, feedback to all teachers articulates clear and data driven next steps that promote improvement in teacher practice.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen instructional practices to ensure that all teachers consistently incorporate challenging tasks that result in high levels of student thinking and participation in learning activities by all students. (1.2)
 - In some classrooms, teachers assign rigorous CCLS aligned tasks requiring students to cite evidence to support their arguments. For example, in a law class, the teacher asked students to use textual evidence from several related non-fiction articles to support their opinions about the role of technology in gun violence. However, in several other classrooms, tasks were of low demand, requiring students either to fill in blank spaces on handouts that provided little room for in-depth written responses to the task or to read short excerpts of texts to answer a few low-level questions. Further, in a majority of classrooms, all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, worked on the same task, with few teachers providing multiple entry points to meet students’ diverse needs. Consequently, during lessons, not all students consistently engage in a productive struggle with challenging tasks that allow them to demonstrate higher order thinking in their work products.
 - Discussions in a few classes engaged students in sharing ideas about how to complete tasks, including partner reading of texts to cite evidence in responding to tasks. For example, students in a health class engaged a partner in a patient-doctor interview about symptoms and causes of selected reproductive health problems, using evidence from short nonfiction excerpts, resulting in participation in discussion by the entire class. However, several other lessons were, for the most part, teacher dominated, resulting in most students sitting quietly, listening to the teacher, with only a few responding when asked. Further, the practice of routinely inviting students to comment on responses by peers as part of student-to-student discussion was not evident across classrooms. As a result, not all students participate actively in peer-to-peer dialogue and thought-provoking questioning that deepen their thinking and learning.

- Refine the process of providing feedback and assessing student mastery of learning goals, so that all teachers make instructional adjustments that maximize students' progress. (2.2)
 - Teachers use a school-wide grading policy, aligned to curricula, to provide feedback to students and their families on student performance on assessments in all disciplines. Teachers also use task-specific rubrics to assess student's proficiency and content knowledge related to specific diagnostic assessments and performance mastery tasks, providing feedback to students regarding what they do well and what needs improvement. Rubrics, aligned to selected State standards and past Regents, help students in both the middle and high school, develop proficiency in meeting requirements for Regents' assessments across content areas, as a majority of the high school teachers design and administer midterms and final assessments that mirror Regents' exams. However, while some students use rubrics to monitor their own work, interviews of students indicated that this practice is not consistent across classrooms. In addition, a review of students' work samples shows limited evidence of meaningful teacher feedback to students, in that while some samples of work show rubric-based performance level scores with teacher comments on post-its, others show only checkmarks with no comments. Further, in some students' folders, there are collections of work that show no evidence of evaluation by a teacher. Thus, actionable feedback that serves as an accurate barometer of students' mastery of targeted skills at both the high and middle school levels is not consistently evident across classrooms.
 - Given the requirements of the new teacher performance assessment system, the school administered a baseline assessment in all core content areas. Teachers reported that they analyzed the results to discern next steps in lesson and unit planning, as well as to inform revisions to existing plans in order to improve student achievement. However, checks for understanding leading to real time adjustments to instruction during the teaching period were not consistently evident across classrooms. For example, although most teachers walked around the room monitoring students while they worked individually or in groups, only a few of the teachers recorded their observations or used them to drive follow up questioning or clarification of academic vocabulary and teaching points. Further, across classrooms, there was limited evidence of ongoing assessment practices such as peer assessment, use of exit tickets, turn-and-talks, and whole class share-outs. As a result, at times, teachers have limited information with which to adjust in-the-moment instruction in ways that address immediate students' needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?				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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			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