

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Olympus Academy

K635

**755 East 100 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

Principal: P.J. Murray

Dates of review: January 14-15, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Aimee Horowitz

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Olympus Academy is a transfer high school with 198 students from ninth through grade 12. The school population comprises 77% Black, 20% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 61.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's strategic organizational, scheduling and key partnership decisions are well aligned to the school's goals as evidenced by meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The school's partnership with iZone and winning a Transfer Schools Common Core Institute (TSCCI) grant facilitated its move from a traditional to an asynchronous blended learning model with a fully "homegrown" curriculum created for Olympus students. Based on student work and data, with support from coaching enabled by the TSCCI grant, the living curriculum is constantly revised to improve learning experiences, enabling teachers to tailor curriculum and tasks to meet students' individual needs. Through the partnership all classrooms are equipped with computers for each student and Smart Boards for use during mini-lessons instructing small groups of students. This instructional model allows flexible pacing so struggling students can spend more time on what they find most difficult while more advanced students move forward, completing courses and earning credits at their own pace. The model also provides for student choice in method of learning. Students in the same class simultaneously work individually, in small groups, use computers, participate in a mini-lesson, collaborate with a partner, work one on one with a teacher, and work on different tasks and skills depending on where they are in the course. The model provides students more individual time with teachers and enables teachers to target those who most need support, which is of significance in a transfer school where 93% of students are overage and under-credited. As a result, Regents passing percentages for students with disabilities exceeded those for general education students. Further, 21% of students in the school's six year cohort have graduated during this school year.
 - The reconfigured school day provides extended time for teacher meetings, additional time for student internships, and time for students to participate in tutoring during and after school. Teacher teams work on three projects in alignment with the school's goals: curriculum design, instruction and achievement, and mastery based learning. The curriculum design team refines Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned courses to strategically integrate the instructional shifts, increase coherence, and ensure college and career readiness. They also created and implemented an online shared system of note-taking for student conferences. The instruction and achievement team builds systems and structures to monitor and enhance academic achievement and instruction including organizing Curriculum Showcases in which teachers deliver sample lessons and course overviews to the faculty for their feedback; creating Danielson aligned tools for teacher use during inter-visitation; and facilitating professional development on priority Danielson components guided by teacher and school goals. Through professional conversations with faculty, professional development, and site visits with other mastery based schools, the mastery based learning team is developing a set of school wide competencies, including academic skills and behaviors, to ensure college and career readiness. As a result of the

new schedule, the English curriculum and courses have been revamped creating coherence and vertical alignment; there is increased rigor in argumentative writing tasks; students' use of relevant and meaningful evidence to support claims has increased; and credit accumulation in English has doubled.

- The school's intensive focus on student welfare cultivates an inclusive and trusting school culture, shaping a safe and respectful learning environment, promoting students' academic and personal growth. (1.4)
 - The theory of action that students learn best when they have strong, positive relationships with adults in the school; are engaged and supported in meeting a rigorous curriculum that prepares them for college and career; and are, as one student says "in charge of my own learning" is the school's foundation. Thus, fostered by a strong partnership with the New York Center for Interpersonal Development (NYCID), the school takes a proactive approach to developing positive personal and academic behaviors in all students. Each student has a NYCID counselor who works collaboratively with teachers to monitor and ensure the student's progress towards goals. During intake counselors gain a deep understanding of each student's social and academic needs and develop a relationship with the student and their family, enabling the school to tailor supports to meet each student's needs. Counselors map out individualized graduation plans with students, greet each student daily upon arrival, and support students through an advisory program based on their credit accumulation status in relation to graduation. Counselors are visible in classrooms observing students, touching base with teachers and students, and conferencing with teachers and students regarding academic progress and personal behaviors. They track student credit accumulation, monitor attendance, monitor student progress towards goals, and support students and families through targeted counseling and mediation. Through advisory counselors implement strategies to develop in students' effective academic and personal behaviors. Culture building continues through Family Nights, Town Halls, and trips, where students are celebrated for their learning, achievement, and progress towards goals. A graduation wall celebrates graduates, top credit earners are distinguished as Olympus shining stars, and the principal recognizes each student upon earning a credit. Student voice is solicited through town hall meetings, through the principal's high visibility in hallways and classrooms, where students constantly engage him in discussion, and through his open door policy. Students have been influential in creating the new schedule, in instituting an overnight trip, and in creating "College Central", a one-stop center supporting college bound students. Students appreciate that they have "personal relationships with their counselors" and they "trust counselors and teachers with problems in school, on the street, and at home." They value the one on one time they have with counselors and teachers, the personal interest they take in them and their well being, and the culture of mutual respect. Students cite this as a key to their success.
- Use of common assessments, tasks, and on-going checks for understanding, provides consistent progress monitoring and facilitates adjustments to curriculum and instruction to improve outcomes for all students. (2.2)

- STAR Enterprise computer adaptive assessments and mock Regents administered twice per semester provide the school data on students' progress towards meeting state and common core learning standards (CCLS). STAR assessments dynamically adjust to each student's responses, pinpointing student achievement levels and identifying gaps. In conjunction with mock Regents item analysis this enables teachers to "meet students where they are to get them to where they need to be." Using this data, teachers create targeted instruction plans for students and provide them with individualized instruction. Students know that the work is individualized and personalized based on assessment data. For example, student's state, "my teacher did this for me because I need help relating the controlling idea to evidence from sources." As a result of targeted instruction in gap areas, scores on mock Regents increased an average of 6% between test administrations.
- Teachers consistently assess student understanding and progress using varied on-going checks for understanding and student self-assessment. As students work on tasks, teachers probe to assess understanding; conference individually and provide the student with an instant email detailing next steps; convene a small group of students for a mini-lesson based on assessment, prior work, or responses to questions; or pair a student with a partner to complete a task. As tasks are scaffolded, and work is submitted online, teachers provide students feedback and make needed adjustments before the student moves on. For example, based on a student's writing, a teacher may have the student use feedback to write an additional draft, compare his work to an exemplar, or use a rubric to self assess and then conference with the student to ensure s/he is on track. Students state that "teachers here take the time to make sure we understand"; "The individual attention and feedback I get from each teacher makes me aware of exactly what I need to improve and what to do to make my work better."
- The principal ensures professional growth by conducting frequent observations with feedback, collegial support, and strategic professional development resulting in improved instruction across the school. (4.1)
 - Using a teacher created Danielson aligned observation tool and a visitation schedule aligned to teachers' professional learning goals, teachers inter-visit with colleagues, reflecting on their own teaching and providing feedback, evidencing the school's collaborative culture of adult learning. Extensive professional development including mentoring, coaching, and strategic team teaching supports new teachers. For example, a senior math teacher co-teaches with a first year math teacher. To aid teachers in delivering instruction in an asynchronous blended learning environment, a school developed Blended Learning Facilitation Modes Guide delves deeply into the types of interactions unique to a blended learning classroom, aligned to Danielson domains 2 and 3. In observation conferences teachers reflect on their role in the asynchronous blended learning classroom and how they have ensured that all students are learning. To enhance their understanding of Danielson, teachers self-assessed using the framework and, in collaboration with the principal, set goals for the chosen two components. The principal's system of providing teachers with instant email feedback of classroom visits noting strengths, weaknesses and actionable next steps with specific attention to components cited as growth areas in

goals. Subsequent observations and coaching focus on applying feedback and progress towards meeting professional goals. On and off-site professional development is aligned to teacher and school-wide goals. For example, to enable a math teacher to use a more constructivist approach in a blended environment, the principal arranged a visit to a school with exemplary practice while science teachers visited a school to learn how to set up and integrate labs into instruction. On site professional development addresses teachers selected areas of growth; questioning and discussion and assessment for instruction. The school's focus on shared leadership and ownership ensures the culture of mutual accountability and of growing leaders from within. Thus, succession plans focus on training those within the school, enabling them to move to new positions as they become available. As a result of frequent feedback, collegial inter-visitation, and strategic professional development, the quality of student work has improved as evidenced by increased credit accumulation. Students earned 285 credits in December, 2013 as compared to 155 in December, 2012. As teachers now use a closing discussion to conclude their lesson, teacher practice in questioning and discussion has improved from an average of 2.3 in the 2012-2013 school year to 3.0 during this year.

What the school needs to improve

- Further refine curricula and tasks and align curricula across content areas so that all students, including those who are high performing, are cognitively engaged, challenged, and required to demonstrate their thinking. (1.1)
 - While some departments plan CCLS aligned units of study incorporating the instructional shifts and literacy standards with a focus on close reading of text, using textual evidence, and argumentative writing, practice across disciplines is uneven. Unit plans provide guidance leading teachers to plan learning activities that include multiple access points for students with disabilities and struggling learners through scaffolding texts, using graphic organizers, vocabulary building, student choice, and personalization. However, across disciplines not all unit plans and academic tasks are designed with extensions to cognitively engage and extend the learning of the school's highest achieving students, thus limiting their ability to demonstrate critical thinking and achieve their potential. Through analysis of student work and data, the curriculum design team is backwards planning from the school's culminating English course, building curriculum coherence. They continue creating scaffolded curriculum and courses that provide students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, with the skills and content necessary for post-secondary success. As tasks that include extensions to enhance the learning of higher achieving students are not created across all disciplines, the highest achieving students are not routinely engaged at a level that enables them to achieve their potential.
- Ensure that teaching practices consistently provide all students with opportunities to engage in critical thinking and discussions so that all learners are challenged to think and achieve at high levels. (1.2)
 - Instruction is aligned to a common set of beliefs about how students learn best informed by the school's commitment to individualization,

personalization, relationships, emotional growth, and student empowerment informed by the Danielson framework. However, uneven levels of high quality questioning in tasks and discussions and in instructing students in strategies to increase college readiness limits the production of work products that challenge the learning levels of all students. While some tasks require students to explain or justify their responses, others simply require students to record notes but do not engage them in critical thinking about the information or its relevance to their lives. As a result, not all tasks appropriately challenge all students to demonstrate higher order thinking that extends their learning and prepares them for college and careers.

- Teacher created blended learning lessons and tasks engage students in critical thinking, problem, solving, and argumentative writing using evidence from sources. For example, in an Economics class, a student was analyzing non-fiction sources gleaning evidence for an essay about how people can both use their monies to enhance their own lives and better the life of their community. Other students were analyzing sources to decide whether overtaxed farmers were justified in rebelling against the government. In English students used evidence from *The Bluest Eye* to determine whether Cholly was completely to blame for the violence he perpetrated against his family. While opportunities for students to think critically about sources and use evidence to support their claims in writing are consistent across classrooms, critical discussions across the majority of classrooms are uneven, limiting some students' abilities to engage with peers in high level evidence based discourse.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Olympus Academy	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