



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning
2013-2014

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Brooklyn Democracy Academy

High School 643

**985 Rockaway Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Andrew Brown

Dates of review: February 6 - 7, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Tamika Matheson

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Brooklyn Democracy Academy is a high school with 202 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 87% Black, and 12% Hispanic students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 64.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Curricula, lessons, and units, are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) to cognitively engage all learners in rigorous academic tasks and promote higher order thinking and college and career readiness. (1.1)
 - The academic year is divided into trimesters, and each core subject area has a scope and sequence purposefully designed to accelerate learning and development of understandings. Curriculum maps are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards, and include Understanding by Design (UBD) components and essential questions to appropriately challenge and engage students in real world application. Essential questions include “Do we as humans have freewill or are we on a predestined path?” and “How does global interaction affect change differently around the world?” Continued refinement, based on formative and summative data, assures that instruction is relevant and meets the needs of students at various developmental stages. Administrators and staff use videos from ARIS Learn and modules to embed Common Core tasks within curriculum maps, and review Regents item analysis data to identify key skills to underscore. For example, an analysis of school data revealed students continued to “struggle with writing and academic vocabulary in all core content areas.” Thus, the school engaged faculty in professional development focused on writing, specifically “quick writes”, and teachers use a quick-write rubric to grade student work, analyze work products weekly, and track performance. Furthermore, teachers identify learning gaps to adjust the scope and sequence and curriculum maps. As a result, teachers consistently refine curricula and academic tasks to challenge and cognitively engage students.
- Teacher pedagogy across classrooms reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, enabling all learners to engage in complex tasks to produce meaningful student work products. (1.2)
 - School administrators and teachers use a systemic approach to employing instructional practices. Teachers collaboratively analyze student work to identify learning gaps. Next, they identify strategies and multiple entry points to guarantee all students, including students with disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELLs), access to curricula. For example, as reflected in classrooms and lesson plans teachers post “skill of the week,” utilize graphic organizers, visual aids such as political cartoons, embed academic and content vocabulary, student discussion structures such as turn-and-talk, and use student responses on exit slips, to continually suitably scaffold learning. Additionally, students in the large group discussed how rubrics are conveniently posted on desks, teachers provide work packets with graphic organizers for support, and teachers give students quality feedback after benchmark exams. As a result, teachers scaffold skills to afford students access to the content matter, and students have opportunities to use actionable feedback to revise their work. Last year, the staff dedicated time and resources to developing questions based on Depth of Knowledge levels, posted question prompts in classrooms and sentence stems for students, thus enabling and challenging students to think critically and respond to

questions in a thoughtful manner. This year, teachers are focusing on skills such as quick-writes, by developing a quick-write rubric, which provides success for student writing. By utilizing a uniform lesson plan template the school ensures coherent instruction across grades and content areas. During bi-weekly meetings, teachers routinely discuss student skills and analyze the effectiveness of strategies on student learning. Furthermore, teachers gradually release scaffolds to foster higher-order thinking, student independence, and accountability, of their own learning. Students are expected to work in groups and teachers strategically pair students to promote social emotional growth. For example, lesson plans include group assignments and differentiated activities, which are tailored for groups of students and individual students. Subsequently, challenging academic tasks render high levels of thinking and rigorous habits as exhibited by student work such as letters written to the Central Park Five, students annotating various levels of text, citing textual evidence, and students taking a position or making a claim based on data organized and analyzed in a “back to back stem and leaf” plots in math. As a result, across classrooms students are academically challenged, actively engaged in learning and produce meaningful work products.

- School partnerships, resources, and strategic programming, are aligned to support the school’s instructional goals and the academic and developmental needs of students as well as professional growth of adults. (1.3)
 - A partnership with the community-based organization, Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) that maintains an office and staff on-site, effectively helps the school address the academic and social-emotional needs of all students and promotes college and career readiness. JCCA advocate counselors are responsible for supporting, monitoring, and tracking the progress of small caseloads of students. Additionally, the school and JCCA collaborate to expose students to college and career readiness opportunities. For example, the school funds college tours such as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Tour and SUNY College Tour Expose. In turn, students and their assigned JCCA advocate counselor are required to complete a college tour application and questionnaire, which include questions such as “Why do you want to be a part of this college trip? What are your plans after high school? What college do you want to go to? What careers are you interested in pursuing and why?” Additionally, a teacher or the assigned JCCA advocate counselor provide responses to questions such as “Is this student a good candidate for a day/overnight college trip? Is this student on track for graduation?, and Does this student have commendable behavior? Thus, students and staff are held accountable for preparing for post- secondary experiences. As a result, JCCA and teachers create targeted and thoughtful action plans to tackle student challenges. The school uses its budget, (\$25,000 Tax Levy Fair Student Funding), to partner with the Center for Educational Options (CEO). CEO facilitates professional development to strengthen instructional practices and strategies such as quick-writes, and curriculum development. Conversely, the school purposefully leverages Network resources to meet the professional needs of staff. The Network creates opportunities for school staff and JCCA to participate in professional development and planning retreats, in addition to monthly meetings. Furthermore, the Principal works with the Network to maximize the school budget to address areas of concern such as attendance, student achievement, and graduation and promotion requirements. Additionally,

programming and budgetary resources are aligned to augment professional collaborations such as teacher team meetings held during and after school. Department teams meet every Tuesday and occasionally on Thursdays, the curriculum team is paid per-session from Title I funding to meet after-school and teacher and advocate counselor teams meet monthly. The school also offers an array of student services in the form of Sanctuary, a drama-based model to provide interventions, after school Regents tutoring, educational trips, APEX online courses, clubs, such as chess, electronic drums, and teams. Thus, students are provided with academic interventions and developmentally appropriate supports as evidenced by an increase in the number of students replying on the 2012-2013 Learning Environment Survey, from 20% to 40%, that the school offers a variety of programs, classes and activities to keep them interested in school, and by a decline in behavioral incidents from 93 from September 2012 through January 2013, to 26 from September 2013 through January 2014..

- Professional collaborations are structured to leverage improvements to positively affect teacher development and student outcomes. (4.2)
 - Staff time that is structured to promote collaboration include the curriculum team, department team, and teachers' and advocate counselors' team. Additionally, the school leader allocates Title I funds to support after-school curriculum team meetings. A common curriculum template is employed which includes "Benchmarks/Units, Essential Questions, Desired Results: Conceptual Understanding, Desired Results: Skills, Mini Lessons/Learning Experiences, Variety of Texts, Multi-media, Key Vocabulary for this Unit, Assessment and Plans for Differentiation of Product, Content or Process." The use of this curriculum template has led to a shared common language, use of common strategies among faculty members, and promoted embedding Citywide Instructional Expectations and Common Core shifts into planning. Furthermore, department teams meet every Tuesday and often on Thursdays to engage in inquiry protocols, to discuss instructional practices, to target gaps in learning, data analysis, and to look at student work. As a result, teachers make timely adjustments to curriculum maps, units, and lesson plans. During the visit, department leaders discussed data-based evidence of student progress in the use of quick writes, teacher team feedback on quick writes, and possible adjustments to the rubric to make it department specific. Although the math and science department leads shared struggles and concerns about the use of quick writes it was agreed that both teams would continue to employ the strategy as school data demonstrated an improvement in students' writing skills, and the department leads agreed to continue to discuss modifying the school- wide rubric to reflect department specific criteria. As per teacher teams looking at students' work from small group interventions, the consistent use of quick writes led to improved writing stamina and an increase in students' willingness to respond to open-ended questions. Additionally, department team leads analyzed Regents' performance data, which revealed very few students attempted to respond to short answers on the math Regents in June 2012, as compared to more students attempting to respond to short answers on the June 2013 exam. Thereby, increasing the average number of points earned from 8 to 11, respectively. Additionally, teachers and advocate counselors meet monthly in teams to conduct teacher advocate conferences (TAC) where they engage in professional conversations about students and record evidence of the meetings on either a TAC calendar, via school memos, and/or student TAC

worksheets used to monitor attendance, performance, behavior, and next steps. As a result, targeted action plans are shared with adult stakeholders in the school community and are implemented in a timely manner. Hence, on the 2012-2013 Learning Environment Survey 92% of teachers responded that school leaders place a high priority on the quality of teaching at my school, and 76% of teachers replied that school leaders provide time for collaboration.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen assessment practices and their alignment to curricula to accelerate student learning and improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - Teachers create assessments based on curriculum map benchmarks built into a trimester schedule that includes four benchmarks/units per term or 12-14 days, thus providing for students to be assessed on skills and content after each benchmark. Assessments which are frequently project-based and include Common Core tasks also incorporate quick writes and focus on incorporating Charlotte Danielson's competencies 3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques and 3d Using Assessment in Instruction. As a result, teachers analyze assessments to make timely adjustments to instructional practices. Additionally, a Center for Educational Options (CEO) staff developer supports teachers and administrators bi-weekly in addition to the Network School Support Facilitator on how to design quick-writes, looking at student work and norming assessment practices. For example, an analysis of last year's Regents data revealed learning gaps around writing and academic vocabulary. As a result, the school increased opportunities for students to use quick writes across content areas, designed a quick write rubric, and created a quick write tracker to monitor student progress. Furthermore, teachers embed ongoing checks for understanding such as student self-assessment opportunities with the use of rubrics, questioning based on Depth of Knowledge, and administration of exit slips. However, the lack of consistency and communication of individualized goals or mastery targets to students limits meaningful feedback and students' awareness and ownership of their next learning steps.
- Expand processes to evaluate school-level decisions to make purposeful and timely adjustments to hasten school improvement. (5.1)
 - School leaders with the support of Center for Educational Options and the Network created structures to support teacher team professional growth, the integration of Common Core shifts in academic tasks, and embedding the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) within the curricula. Additionally, the school leader hired a community associate to manage extracurricular activities, to recruit students for Public School Athletic League (PSAL) teams and to address and mediate student behavioral issues. However, the lack of processes to purposely evaluate the quality of teacher teamwork and professional development practices for teachers and by teachers, currently limits teachers' ability for further self-reflection to increase student mastery and achievement with additional adjustments to curricula. Furthermore, the limited time allocated to a deliberate evaluation of school culture hinders timely adjustments to goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Brooklyn Democracy 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