



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Academics, Performance and Support
2013-2014**

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The Literary Arts Academy

Middle School M326

**401 West 164th Street
Manhattan
NY10032**

Principal: Sharon Weissbrot

Dates of review: November 25-26, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Nicky Kram Rosen

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Literary Arts Academy is a middle school with 283 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 11% Black, 87% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 43% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 88.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school-wide adoption of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned curricula supports the integration of the instructional shifts that ensures college and career readiness for all learners. (1.1)
 - Using New York City (NYC) Department of Education (DOE) rubrics to evaluate their school-wide curriculum, school leaders and teachers concluded that the materials lacked rigor, did not fully address the CCLS instructional shifts, nor meet the needs of their students. As a result, the school has adopted DOE core curriculum including CodeX for English language arts (ELA) and the Connected Math Program (CMP3) for math, which are being implemented across all classrooms. School-wide teaching and learning for all students now includes rigorous tasks, close reading of texts, rich academic vocabulary, and attention to convention and organization, which fosters high levels of student thinking that requires the consideration of multiple meanings, as well as the ability to support positions and demonstrate thinking in new ways.
 - Based upon student work and data school leaders and teachers identified achievement gaps in literacy. Across all content areas curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using resources from the Engage NY website, so that all students engage in learning opportunities in order to build literacy skills in all core content areas, incorporate evidence based claims, and meet grade-level specific academic expectations.
- The school gathers and analyzes a variety of meaningful data to identify trends and makes adjustments to the instructional program in order to improve student learning outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school uses students' performance on selected measures of student learning to identify trends and patterns regarding students' strengths and areas in need of improvement. For example, this fall the science department administered the New York City Performance Assessment in Science. Afterwards, the traits contained in the rubric were noted and the students' performance on each trait analyzed and evaluated. In response, teachers and administrators identified one trait that students' needed additional instruction and practice. Additionally, teacher created assessments are aligned with the school's curriculum, and are part of the feedback loop and cycles of continuous improvement established, resulting in teachers identifying and explicitly citing the impact of their instructional responses on student progress relative to learning goals, which is shared with students and families four times during the school year via individual student progress reports.
 - After close examination of student growth percentiles from 2011- 2012 to 2012-2013, school leaders and teachers identified the need to strengthen writing at all levels. As a result, across all grades, and in each subject area teachers use common, curriculum-based, assessments and "reflection notebooks" to document what's working and what's not. Then

each week teachers look at student work, reflect on their practice to identify gaps in students' understanding and effectively make adjustments to their instruction in order to meet the identified needs of students.

- Teachers regularly collaborate to examine student work, plan for instruction, and share effective practices, resulting in improved progress for specific groups of students. (4.2)
 - Teacher teams, comprised of content area teachers across all grades, as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) and special education teachers, meet five times a week. One meeting is focused on inquiry linked to school-wide goals, and the other meetings are devoted to looking at student work to identify gaps in instruction to adapt and modify lessons to meet students' needs. Additionally, teacher teams are collaborative, full of professional conversation and adhere to structured inquiry protocols. As part of teacher teams' targeted and focused collaborative inquiry around literacy instruction, content teachers across all grades along with special education and ESL providers shared and presented evidence that all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), were demonstrating increased focus and stamina in their ability to closely read a text and cite passages from various texts.
 - Each teacher team is dynamic and exhibits trust and distributive leadership. At each teacher team meeting one member of the team facilitates, prepares the agenda, and brings student work for review, while another team member is the recorder, and another serves as time keeper. Furthermore, each team uses a protocol developed by school leaders and teachers to address the purpose and meet the objective of the meeting. This has led to greater school-wide coherence and consistency across grades and classrooms, thus creating optimal conditions for student learning.
- School leaders make informed and purposeful decisions in order to improve instruction and meet students learning needs (1.3)
 - A strong culture of collaboration focused on meeting the school's goals is demonstrated by the unanimous school based option vote to modify extended day practices from 37 1/2 minutes three days a week to two 50 minute blocks twice weekly. Furthermore, teachers' programs reflect dedicated daily meeting times. Moreover, to support the high level of need for the schools' large population of ELLs, fair school and Title III funding allow for teachers to offer early morning and after school small group tutoring in math. In addition, during the mid-February and spring school vacations, "Vacation Camp" provides academic support in ELA and math during normal school hours. Students are invited to attend based on their scholarship, progress reports and needs. This has led to increased consistency in student performance, high levels of engagement of students in learning, and increased access to learning opportunities for all students, especially ELLs.
 - Targeted programming is demonstrated in most classes, as the sixth and seventh grades are being served by two teachers. For example, ESL teachers push-in to regular classes to provide equal access to learning

activities for students whose English is emerging. Special education and subject area specialists co-teach during language arts and math periods. These strategic assignments are focused on meeting student's instructional needs so that school goals can be achieved. As a result, nearly 80% of those students who faced retention in their last grade, were able to be promoted and remain with their cohort, demonstrating increasing readiness for high school, college and/or careers.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve instructional practices to include multiple entry points in order to provide appropriately challenging activities aligned to students' achievement levels. (1.2)
 - School leaders and teachers are working together to ensure the school's curricula are aligned to CCLS, address the instructional shifts, and reflect their beliefs about how students learn best. Both teachers and administrators share that additional professional development is planned and needed so the Danielson Framework for Teaching can be better understood and thus used to inform and improve instructional practice, so that their students' work products and discussions reflect higher-order level thinking and many more participate in discussions.
 - Teachers present lessons that are well grounded in the curriculum. In the vast majority of classrooms visited, students are grouped for instruction, where high levels of engagement are consistent. Most teachers report that their students, including ELLs and SWDs are grouped based on behavior or in groups where one student serves to support others who are struggling with the learning task, which are decisions based on past summative and current formative assessments. Classroom visits noted and students confirm that they are not routinely offered multiple entry points, needed supports, nor provided with choice for learning activities, or extensions or enrichments for higher achieving students. This prevents all students from engaging in high level learning tasks in order to demonstrate their thinking.
- Continue to build teacher's understanding of the Danielson framework for teaching in order to ensure that all staff meets pedagogical expectations focused on improving student performance. (4.1)
 - Teachers are engaged in on-going professional conversations with administrators and receive feedback; however, teacher feedback and next steps, which are systematically recorded via the cycles of classroom observation, are not consistently analyzed alongside student work/data. This results in the school's inability to advance professional growth and reflection as aligned to student outcomes.
 - School leaders have a system for analyzing pedagogical performance over time through the use of a summary log with the dates of each observation, including a rating associated with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. To date, most staff has been observed informally, or is engaged in a professional conversation related to their practice. The Danielson Framework for Teaching competency 3B regarding questioning and discussion is included in the school's current professional

development (PD) plan, with sessions devoted to strengthening teachers' overall practice. A need was expressed by teachers and school leaders for specific training related to areas in need of improvement as identified in classroom observations, and feedback sessions, in order to deepen understanding regarding the Danielson Framework, and improve instructional practice specific to student needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Literary Arts School	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