



Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Preparatory Academy for Writers

Middle-High School 283

**143-10 Springfield Boulevard
Queens
NY 11413**

Principal: Charles Anderson

Dates of review: December 13-14, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Preparatory Academy for Writers is a middle-high school with 528 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 84% Black, 9% Hispanic, 2% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 96.3% for the middle school and 91.3% for the high school.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Across classrooms, teachers consistently utilize instructional strategies that provide multiple entry points and opportunities for discussion, leading to high levels of thinking, participation, and ownership of learning by all students.(1.2)
 - All lessons demonstrate effective use of student-to-student discussions, effective questioning, and activities that provide access to learning in multiple ways, thus engaging all students. Lessons involve a brief whole class introduction, followed by students being divided into three groups, with each group rotating across three learning stations. Thus students participate in hands-on learning experiences that immerse them in reading, writing, listening, and discussion activities that challenge them to think critically. For example, in a math classroom, students in group one responded to focus questions about polynomials and operations with unlike terms, while a second group worked on creating and using trinomial expressions to show varied math operations, and a third group used laptops to work on solving problems receiving immediate feedback from a math website, thus pushing their thinking towards next steps for correct solutions. Flexible groupings, at times heterogeneous and at other times homogenous, allow students to receive support from peers, as they use rubrics to complete learning tasks at each station. A peer “teacher” leads each group, assigning points for task completion and responding to questions, while the teacher either listens in on each group asking probing questions, or works with a group on the mini-lesson portion of the rotations. Teachers include students with disabilities within each group, and via graphic organizers, writing prompts, and focus questions, scaffold and extend lessons so that all students have access to the content. The sharing of reflections on or presentations of work at the end of lessons, leads to discussions and student work products that evidence high-level thinking and deep understanding of lesson concepts. As a result, across classrooms and disciplines, teachers’ implementation of effective strategies facilitates instruction that engages all students in activities, fostering higher-order thinking and their ownership of learning.
- The administration prioritizes strategic alignment of the school’s resources to its goals, with organizational decisions that are highly effective in empowering staff to maximize student achievement. (1.3)
 - School goals target ongoing improvement in teacher practice as a means to support long-range, sustained improvement in academic achievement by all subgroups of students, thus ensuring that students are ready for next steps, including adequate credit accumulation leading to graduation. In support of the goals, the principal has modified the school’s schedule from a traditional semester model to trimesters. This allows students who do not pass a course in either one of the first two semesters, to be re-programmed during the third session to make up the missing work, providing students with an immediate intervention towards credit recovery and precluding them from having to attend summer school. The principal has also invested in technology, with computers strategically placed in English language arts classrooms, so students can prepare professional looking, typed documents for inclusion in their portfolios. Additionally, the

principal has leveraged the school's budget by placing two teachers in each classroom to support the full integration of all students with disabilities in a predominantly team teaching model at all grade levels. With special education teachers being programmed by discipline, they are able to work regularly with general education colleagues and coaches, building teacher capacity to improve instruction across the school. Strategic program assignments place teachers in areas where they have the greatest impact on student achievement. Middle school teachers teach English language arts and social studies, while math teachers teach math and science, allowing teachers to engage in interdisciplinary teaching with the same cohort of students, thus maximizing time on task, and minimizing time lost in transitions between classes. These decisions have strengthened academic achievement, as evidenced by student and staff portfolios with exemplary writing samples across disciplines, observation reports, and data ranking the school in the 89th and 73rd percentile among high and middle schools, respectively.

- School leaders and staff cultivate a respectful and inclusive environment with a range of highly effective support services addressing students' academic and social emotional needs. (1.4)
 - The school's approach to building culture is based on the belief that through Performance, Responsibility, Integrity, Determination, and Engagement, (PRIDE), each student can be guided to become a reflective thinker and independent learner in a safe and supportive environment. Teachers fill out a PRIDE sheet distributed weekly that is sent home for parent's input. Students focus on PRIDE in Targeted Educational and Advisory Meetings (TEAMs) during which each student develops a personalized relationship with an advisor. Each advisor uses the College Board advisory curriculum to frame a discussion of student's academic goals, personal concerns, attendance, punctuality, safety needs, and work samples for a mandatory scholarship portfolio, basing their conversations on data from class section sheets filled in by all teachers, and on data from Jupiter Grades, an online data reporting system. To foster strong social and academic growth, the principal rewards students who receive points for PRIDE, allowing them to participate in monthly events created by the student government team and in annual traditions, including a snowball or pie-throwing event, which allows students to throw a pie or snowball at the principal. Guidance counselors team up with social work interns and advisors to educate students and families about high school or college choices, ensuring support for all students in developing plans for their next steps. A mandatory after school academic probation program staffed by content area teachers four days per week, provides opportunities for struggling students to make up missing work. Activities, including sports, dance, music, theatre, talent shows, and clubs, round out a comprehensive program of academic and personal supports. Consequently, there is an average attendance rate of 94.3% to date, and improvement in student achievement as documented on the school's Progress Report, showing the middle school improving from the 57th percentile in 2012 to the 73rd percentile in 2013, and the high school moving from the 73rd percentile in 2012 to the 89th percentile in 2013.
- School leaders place a high priority on regular evaluation of teacher practice using the Danielson Framework to inform feedback loops that communicate clear expectations and next steps to accelerate teacher development. (4.1)

- Observation reports, a calendar detailing observation cycles, competencies being targeted, the time frame for evaluations, and an administrator assigned to each teacher, indicate that school administrators conduct frequent cycles of classroom observations, linked to clear expectations for teacher practice. Each teacher maintains a professional portfolio that includes documentation of feedback from an administrator, with actionable next steps for improving their practice in alignment to the expectations of the Danielson Framework, and relative to the teacher's individual professional goals. With all teachers scheduled for six informal observations and three scholarship conferences, the principal has crafted a unique performance evaluation system that allows administrators to meet with teachers in one-to-one conferences, nine times during the school year. The use of student work and data, as well as lesson artifacts as additional measures of teacher effectiveness, inform the accuracy of feedback about each teacher's strengths and areas for additional growth. To help clarify expectations embedded in feedback, including next steps given to individual teachers, the principal invites teachers to view instructional practices in his own eighth grade English language arts classroom. Additionally, teacher leaders work with new and experienced teachers, providing another layer of feedback to support effective delivery of instruction in all classrooms. As a result, feedback on teacher performance has accelerated teacher development, as evidenced by observation data and interviews of teachers who stated that feedback from administrators has changed their practice, with positive impact on student learning, as documented by student data profiles and tracking spreadsheets in professional portfolios kept by staff and students.
- School staff communicate to students and families high expectations for college and career readiness, and the school implements multiple structures so that students succeed. (3.4)
 - Every student is required to maintain a scholarship portfolio with learning goals, a personalized mission statement, collections of work done across disciplines, spreadsheets with results of assessments, and self-assessment essays, all of which the principal reviews with them at one-to-one conferences each trimester. Advisors guide students in creating their documents and related artifacts for inclusion in their portfolio. Furthermore a one-page curriculum unit overview document spells out expectations for students relative to their learning in each discipline and an academic contract signed by each student and a parent, serves as a reminder of what students are expected to do in order to be successful in meeting all requirements for promotion and graduation. In addition, from grade 6 through grade 12, advisors use TEAMS to introduce advisory curriculum units that engage all students in learning activities that emphasize expectations for graduation, and to be college and career ready. The school also offers seven advanced placement classes and has a College Now partnership that allows students to take college courses onsite or at York College, providing support for students to meet the high expectations set for them. A College and Career Readiness Center displays multiple resources about colleges, scholarships, financial aid, and job search steps, facilitates student and parent conferences, as well as supports students with independent research that helps them to develop their plan for college and careers. PRIDE sheets and a weekly Town Hall gathering combine to offer students additional feedback about

expectations for present and future academic success. Parents state that with workshops, conferences, scholarship reports, progress notes, phone calls and data on the Jupiter Grades portal, they too receive regular feedback about their children's performance and know what they need to do to help prepare their children for movement to the next level. As a result, students continue to make progress towards being college and career ready, as evidenced by school data and spreadsheets created by students to track and graph their own data across core disciplines.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine assessment practices to consistently implement ongoing checks for understanding and deepen feedback that drives student self-assessment and effective adjustments to curriculum and instruction for all learners. (2.2)
 - Given the requirements of the new teacher performance assessment system, the school administered a baseline assessment in English language arts and math, for both high and middle school students. Teachers reported that they analyzed the results to discern next steps in lesson and unit planning, as well as set goals for the next unit of instruction. The school also administered a Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment at the middle school level, creating a profile of individual student's strengths and areas of needs to inform the selection of independent reading texts. For each course taught, teachers also administer periodic assessments aligned to the content specific Common Core Standards, generating data that informs adjustments to instruction and curriculum. All teachers use and guide students in benefitting from a variety of rubrics to engage in peer- and self-assessment, and teachers assess learning through students' journal writing across the curriculum. Performance based authentic assessments within content areas, and teachers sharing a common grading policy and collaboratively developing rubrics within each content area, enable the generation of feedback about students' progress towards mastery of a given task. However, the format, quality, and quantity of feedback on assessments varies across disciplines, with some samples of student writing showing checkmarks with comments, including next steps, others showing number grades only, or just a check mark or a rubric-based performance level score with comments on post-its. Thus, the information gleaned from feedback is not always sufficient in planning next steps. In addition, teacher practice during instruction, at times showed missed opportunities to engage in ongoing assessment of learning, with the result that students in need of help or advanced students who finished a task quickly, did not have their learning needs sufficiently addressed, thus adversely impacting their learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Preparatory Academy for Writers	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