



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

VOYAGES Preparatory

High School 744

45-10 94th Street

Elmhurst

NY 11373

Principal: Nicholas Merchant Bleiberg

Dates of review: March 20 - 21, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Musa Ali Shama

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

VOYAGES Preparatory is a high school with 203 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 22% Black, 62% Hispanic, 5% White and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled, and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 66.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal maximizes organizational resources, including the development of key partnerships and strategic scheduling of staff time to support the school's goal that students produce meaningful work products. (1.3)
 - The principal has purchased new laptop carts that are utilized by teachers to engage students in doing college level research, developing skills that lead to college and career readiness, and providing opportunities to increase student performance in meaningful tasks. For example, we saw students using laptops in a lesson to conduct research and read articles in a science class. Additionally, the school uses technology to create a popular Music Production program that exposes students to careers in sound engineering. Additionally, school leaders have developed key partnerships, including one with the Queens Community House (QCH), through which counselors provide targeted support to students and engage in daily structured collaboration with the instructional team in developing interventions and supports for students. Teachers stated that this structured collaborative time maintains effective communication with students' guidance counselors and colleagues.
 - The principal has established a Rigor and Rubrics Committee responsible for identifying and celebrating gold, bronze, and silver, honor roll students as well as students with excellent attendance. In addition, staff time is structured so that members of the instructional team are engaged in data analysis, curricula planning and revision. For example, the principal allocated funding from a Network grant to create a Year 6 Committee prior to the start of the 2014 school year. This interdisciplinary team of staff members is engaged in the ongoing analysis of school data, the development, and revision of school-wide goals, and in the creation of a professional development plan aligned to the school's instructional goals and citywide instructional expectations. A key initiative implemented by the committee has been the professional development foci on questioning and discussion protocols, Understanding by Design course mapping, and discipline-specific literacy. Furthermore, the faculty meets daily for teacher-led professional development Data Days, engaging in analysis of cohort and school-wide data and the revision of curricula. This strategic use of staff time has resulted in staff collaborations that effectively deepen student engagement in rigorous tasks.
- The instructional team has developed a nurturing and inclusive environment that meaningfully engages students in school initiatives, and supports students' academic and social emotional growth. (1.4)
 - The school's approach to incorporating student voice in decision-making ensures that students feel a strong sense of pride and ownership for their school. For example, the Fairness Committee ("The Exchange") meets regularly to discuss school policies and to support individual students who may have broken a school rule or had a conflict. Students stated that "if there's a disagreement, we sit down, we talk about how we feel, and we resolve the issue." The Student Council meets regularly with school administration to make recommendations regarding classes, schedules, and

school trips. The Event Planning and Calendar Group has assisted in planning major events for the school year, including graduation, the prom, and student and family day. The Student Journalism Group, with the support of a teacher, is involved in facilitating multi-media project workshops for student advisories. Students affirmed that their participation in these committees and activities has positively impacted school safety, and parents, students, and staff affirmed the safe, nurturing, and rigorous learning environment.

- A weekly “Opening Meeting” takes place every Monday morning and provides students and staff with an opportunity to strengthen relationships and share breakfast. In addition, all staff and students participate in structured activities designed to promote student attendance and engagement and a climate of mutual respect, leading to an inclusive school culture that supports student progress towards goals. Each morning, Queens Community House (QCH) counselors welcome students as they enter the school, monitoring student attendance and texting students who have not arrived. QCH counselors regularly meet with students to review transcripts and progress toward graduation, and notify parents of student absence and academic progress. QCH counselors also support students’ college and career readiness through strategic internship placement. Students stated that they know and trust their guidance counselors and parents and students agreed that the QCH counselors play an integral role in providing personalized supports that positively impact students’ academic and personal behaviors.
- Across classrooms, teachers utilize assessments and common grading practices to provide students with actionable feedback that supports student progress toward identified goals. (2.2)
 - The principal has implemented assessment practices that include baseline, benchmark, and predictive assessments. For example, to support the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards’ aligned curricula all students took the baseline English Language Arts Performance Task in September, and faculty analyzed the outcomes to identify areas where individual students needed additional support. Additionally, teachers assess student progress through the administration of quarterly assessments across classrooms utilizing common rubric elements. Quarterly assessments measure student progress relative to the developing skills of making a claim, reading strategically to identify the evidence that supports the claim, and using analysis and interpretation to make connections between claim and evidence. Teachers provide students with meaningful, actionable feedback and next steps using a common rubric, providing a clear rationale for student grades. Students articulated that quarterly assessments help them prepare for Regents exams and college level work, and give them the opportunity to demonstrate what they learned in the course.
 - The school has implemented a common grading policy that formulates the elements of grades and the weight of each element, leading to a clear portrait of student mastery. In addition, teachers use common assessments such as the English language arts Regents data to identify students in need of additional literacy support. The instructional team has implemented the Writing and Reading Assessment Profile (WRAP), and provides teachers with professional development and training on discipline-specific literacy strategies through the use of the program SAL (Supporting Adolescent

Literacy). Thus, teachers are being trained to accurately assess and target support for students. In addition, the school monitors students' progress in their developing skills using a color-coded spreadsheet that identifies student areas of need and this information enables school leaders and teachers to adjust curricular and instructional decisions to meet the needs of all students.

- The principal communicates high expectations to staff, students, and their families, and provides support structures to ensure success in meeting school expectations and in supporting students' college and career readiness. (3.4)
 - Each Monday morning, the principal hosts an all-school Opening Meeting where he promotes positive attendance, mutual respect, and professional expectations. Additionally, the principal communicates his expectations for teaching and learning to the staff through a weekly newsletter "The Voyages Week in Review", and through frequent observations and feedback to teachers aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. All teachers create individual professional growth plans (IPGP), which are reviewed by the principal and revised by teachers throughout the year. The school's professional-period structure provides teachers with daily meeting time where colleagues share best practice, develop and implement new initiatives, and reflect on their work and professional goals. Staff wide professional development is teacher led and differentiated, and the principal has established a system of shared accountability for progress towards individual professional goals.
 - The school incorporates the Learn-to-Work (LTW) model that provides students with career counseling, workshops, attendance outreach, and paid student internships. The LTW internship coordinator has established partnerships with a wide range of employers in and out of the school building, recruiting and interviewing student interns, and pairing student interns with paid internships that build students' career readiness skills. In addition, college and career fairs take place throughout the year, providing students with face-to-face time with representatives of post-secondary institutions. The counseling staff organizes college visits and tours in and outside of New York City, and a representative of the College Access and Success Program (CASP) is on-site each week to provide additional support and counseling for students regarding post-secondary education. The staff routinely hosts parent/caregiver workshops and meetings for parents, providing them with an opportunity to meet with their children's teachers and guidance counselors and receive updates on their children's progress. In addition, staff members facilitate regular Saturday workshops for families, including English as a second language classes and workshops on job training, technology, healthcare and parenting. These structures and systems provide students with extensive college and career readiness opportunities, and build effective home-school partnerships.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop curricula that incorporate higher-order skills and meaningful tasks to promote rigorous habits, critical thinking skills, and evidence based discourse and that provide access to cognitively engage all students. (1.1)

- The school has begun to align its curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) by developing unit maps in all content areas through the Understanding by Design model. Most of the units reviewed included CCLS and content area standards to be addressed, as well as enduring understandings, essential questions, targeted content, skills, diagnostic assessments and culminating performance tasks. The principal stated that a primary instructional goal was to support students in developing claims, reading strategically to identify evidence that supports the claim, and using analysis and interpretation to make a connection between claim and evidence. Although this was evident in the ELA maps reviewed, other content area maps are beginning to reflect this alignment designed to emphasize the Common Core instructional shifts in literacy across all content areas.
- Although curricula is being developed to incorporate key standards, offer applications of learning, and promote rigorous habits through academic tasks, it was not evident that this is coherently extended across all classes so that every student is suitably challenged. The curricula provided a framework for teachers and indicated content and skills to be covered as well as enduring understandings. However, the lesson plans reviewed lacked explicit teacher planning that reflected designated learning activities to address all learners based on the use of student data. Furthermore, while the plans include some scaffolds that anticipate the needs of diverse or struggling learners, unit planning, and refinement using, analysis of student work is just beginning. As a result, modifications of academic tasks for students with disabilities and for students with low literacy levels that gave all students access to curricula was not evident. For example, one science unit plan had students represent scientific data in a variety of graph forms and create an organized notebook of information for studying Regents-based questions. In that same map, the only differentiation strategy noted was for students who were exhibiting difficulty passing Regents exams was that a teacher would explain each question to stimulate mastery and confidence in small groups. This inconsistent planning hinders teachers' capacity to close the achievement gap and prepare all students to be college and career ready.
- Ensure that teaching strategies and academic tasks consistently provides access to curricula and meets the needs of diverse learners to foster higher order thinking skills and meaningful student engagement across classrooms. (1.2)
 - Although we saw students engrossed in discussions and developing work products that required high levels of thinking, this was not observed across classrooms. For example we observed students in a math class working on graphing equations and inequalities by using manipulatives and then required to write a justification of their solutions. In an ELA class students were defining their understanding of ethics and each student shared their thinking. However, in a science class students were sitting in groups working on laptops and were required to read an article as a group from preselected topics and then had to share out to the class what they found to be interesting. Students lacked clear guidance and structures on what they were looking for, a protocol of discussing the article in their groups, and what they were expected to present, leading to little student discourse and low student engagement. Consequently, across classrooms, limited students'

access to engage in tasks and discussions that reflected high levels of student thinking and participation hinders further academic growth.

- The principal has invested time and effort in building teacher capacity to execute lessons, with an emphasis on exploration through group learning and discussion using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In addition, students stated that they enjoyed lessons when they had the opportunity to discuss engaging topics with their peers. However, teaching practices across classrooms were inconsistent in engaging students in discussion. An English language arts lesson that began with essential questions of “What is love?” and “What is Betrayal?” had students engaged in student-to-student discourse. In this discussion, students supported claims by citing evidence from Junot Diaz’s “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”. However, a social studies lesson was teacher-directed, where the arrow of recitation went from teacher to student with missed opportunities for the question to be posed to the class for rich student-to-student discussion. Therefore, a lack of coherence in the use of questioning and discussion techniques inhibits rich classroom discussion and student engagement in critical thinking.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: VOYAGES Preparatory	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