

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The Laboratory School of Finance & Technology

Middle/High School X223

360 East 145th Street

Bronx

NY 10454

Principal: Dr. Ramon Gonzalez

Dates of review: December 17-18, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Laboratory School of Finance and Technology is a middle/high school with 451 students from grades six through grade 9. The school population comprises 23% Black, 76% Hispanic, 0.5% White, and 0.5% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Content area plans and curricula are well aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), resulting in instructional coherence across grades and cognitive engagement of all students. (1.1)
 - School leaders ensure that CCLS aligned curricula and the related instructional shifts are strategically integrated by continuously making purposeful decisions that lead to meaningful teacher conversations during planning sessions. In order to ensure cohesive and coherent instructional plans across content areas and grades, teachers collaboratively analyze student work and discuss curricula as well as successful teaching strategies that can be replicated across classrooms, thus ensuring that all students have access to cognitively engaging tasks. The school-wide instructional focus on meeting students' individual needs is evident in lesson activities designed to engage them in debates, collaborative projects and student-directed group interactions, affording them opportunities to participate in discussions that connect their learning to real world experiences. Students are required to complete performance tasks where they problem-solve, demonstrate their thinking and make decisions that lead to the conceptualization of the given task, but more so, promote reflection on their own learning via rubrics, surveys and peer-to-peer feedback. As teachers infuse engaging tasks in their instructional plans and instill in students a sense of responsibility towards self-learning and self-assessment, all students gain access to curricula that fosters college and career readiness across classrooms.
 - The school-wide curriculum website serves as an important asset in the sharing of data, teacher team agenda notes and outcomes, performance tasks and customized lesson plans to meet the individual instructional needs of students. This online access provides teachers with a variety of tools and a rich array of instructional practices aligned to the areas in need of focus, based on the analysis of specific students' work products. In addition, creatively designed curriculum maps across all content areas afford students, including the highest and lowest performing students, English language learners and students with disabilities, access to tasks aligned to their unique focal points of entry, resulting in teacher capacity to ensure student immersion in rich learning activities. For example, to support in-depth learning, every student in the ninth is required to complete tasks that emphasize the use of technology as an instructional tool that provides ready access to the informational world, offers reminders of course requirements and deadlines, and supports student communication with teachers. Thus, curricula and tasks, across content areas and grade levels, provide all students with exposure to tasks that are designed to promote high levels of cognitive engagement.
- Teachers and school leaders use a variety of assessment tools in order to ensure that actionable and timely feedback is consistently provided to students and teachers, resulting in improved instruction for all students. (2.2)

- Research-based instructional conversations linked to ongoing data analyses align to a variety of assessments such as pre- and post-assessments in English language arts and math, diagnostics, rubrics, checklists, and portfolios, thereby, allowing all staff to hold deep discussions on student progress across all subject areas. The 'sampling of data' via mid-workshop breaks, productive turn-and-talks and exit tickets, ensure check-ins for understanding, thus challenging teachers to scaffold their teaching in order to strengthen student mastery of targeted learning standards and goals as well as accurately ascertain students' level of academic improvement. Comparison of summative data with data from formative assessments provides the school with data on specific school-wide skills in need of focus, such as stamina, evidence writing and procedural knowledge. These areas have led to the creation of after school "Study Hall" sessions for all students to participate in enrichment activities that enhance their learning or offers them differentiated interventions that address their individual areas of need. The low ratio of adult-to-students in instructional groups contributes to targeted instruction needed to support individual students' growth towards increased academic performance. Student work products displayed in classrooms reflect how students use rubrics and teacher feedback to inform their own writing. Additionally, students engage in peer-to-peer feedback where they provide ideas, insights and next steps to improve their writing as well as other students' products such as presentations, research papers, and graphic organizers, resulting in their awareness of next learning steps as they revise, self-correct to learn and become better at their work. As a result, students strive towards responsibility and independence, acknowledging the challenges they face as they prepare for the next level and beyond. As one student stated, "We are not at our peak in learning, but have many opportunities to get better."
- The school culture effectively supports the academic and social emotional well-being of students, leading to improved attendance rate and increased student self-confidence and academic growth. (1.4)
 - The school mission of 'Continual Improvement and Growth' reflects the school's theory of action that its instructional focus goes hand in hand with the social emotional well-being of every student. This premise is embedded across school activities, with student work and messages displayed in all classrooms and hallways sending a message of unity and understanding that staff, students and families are the primary contributors to a supportive and positive school climate, resulting in sustainable academic and personal growth of students and adults. Students appreciate the fact that the adults in the building are caring individuals who 'go out of their way' to ensure that, by any means possible, students stay on track, academically and socially, in order to meet school expectations and learning goals. As teachers stay after school or meet one-on-one with students to provide support them, a strong rapport develops between teachers and students who get to know each other very well, leading to respect and community-building across the school. Students feel confident that any adult is ready to help them through any dilemma they may be going through. In order to ensure that staff, students and parents can access appropriate tools and/or resources to support their immediate concerns, the guidance counselor has developed a website where they can access information, email staff

members for support and anonymously report concerns they have. The use of technology as a school-wide instructional tool also allows all stakeholders to inform themselves about school events and communicate lessons learned throughout the school building, resulting in improved student academic and personal behaviors. For example, “Bullying” being a hot topic nationwide, teachers suggested small group discussions on this topic so students recently participated in research projects on bullying, which culminated with school-wide assemblies, thus creating school-wide awareness of the importance of being proactive, even as a bystander. The school values students’ physical growth, providing before and after school intramural sports programs through which students learn good sportsmanship skills and healthy habits. In order to participate in sports, overnight college trips, and girls’ trip to the famous Google company, students are held to high standards in daily attendance, completion of rigorous performance tasks, and good behavior. Students know that any deviance from these requirements results in immediate conversations with their homeroom teachers, school leaders and/or guidance counselor, to devise a strategic plan that can be used to remedy their situation so they can continue on a path of improvement leading to their success. As a result of these supports, students’ academic achievement and attendance continue to show gains, as evidenced by an attendance rate of over 94% to date and during the past year, as well as an “A” for student progress on the most recent Progress Report.

- School leaders make highly strategic decisions in staffing and the use of school time to ensure instruction that results in increased student achievement. (1.3)
 - School leaders embrace the belief of hiring individuals to be nurtured for growth in-house, promoting distributive leadership throughout the school. For example, close to half of the present staff student-taught at the school before being hired, in order to build their capacity as teachers, maintain the fluidity of high quality of instruction across the school, and ensure that the delivery aligns with school-wide goals, resulting in improved instruction and student engagement in challenging activities and performance tasks. In addition to local funding, the leadership leverages outside funding from universities and not-for-profit organizations, resulting in college and career readiness activities and extended learning time for students and retreats for collaborative learning and reflection by staff. Through department meetings and common planning sessions, teachers meet regularly with consultants and coaches by grades and by content areas, sharing and celebrating each other’s successes and next steps towards learning. The teacher “Shout-Out” board depicts teachers’ effective practices that can be observed by colleagues for continued learning and growth. During these meetings, teachers analyze student work via the use of on-task checklists and rubrics, identifying what a student does well and possible strategies that will benefit the particular student as well as the greater population of students, with specific focus on interventions for English language learners and students with disabilities. As a result, teachers regularly reflect on their own craft and make instructional decisions that positively impact more students across grades and content areas, as evidenced by student work viewed and the most recent Progress Report data showing the school with an overall grade of “A” and a current ranking of 91 percentile.

- School leaders and teachers use the Danielson Framework for Teaching to provide constructive and frequent feedback to teachers, ensuring individual teacher growth and supporting teacher development school-wide. (4.1)
 - Based on a carefully crafted cycle of formal and informal observations, school leaders provide teachers with timely and frequent feedback linked to analysis of student work and data, to improve teacher pedagogy schoolwide. Administrators calibrate their feedback to teachers to ensure that the professional development and structured teacher meetings continue to address the differentiated needs of teachers for overall improvement. As they provide face-to-face feedback to teachers, this process becomes a reciprocal session where teachers reflect on their practice, with next steps for growth that inform their instruction, leading to growth in teacher pedagogy, as evidenced by observation data reviewed. Teacher capacity-building is at the core of the school's instructional values. Thus, in order to ensure that teachers have access to professional development resources, such as yearly curricula, pacing charts, and meeting outcomes, the school designed a website available to all staff. In addition, new teachers have assigned mentors as well as and consultants and coaches who provide ongoing support for their professional growth. The principal also leads monthly New Teacher meetings to discuss effective academic and social emotional practices and engage in text-based discussions, through the New Teacher Book Club, resulting in a collaborative learning community with the principal at the helm of this process. Due to the variety of partnerships the leadership has established, teachers participate in team activities aligned to competencies embedded in the Danielson Framework for Teaching, leading to improved instruction, as teachers receive multiple forms of support that target their needs and professional goals.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to build on pedagogical practices so that all lessons strategically incorporate multiple entry points that maximize student participation and result in high quality work products by all students. (1.2)
 - The school's mission is to ensure that all students have access to quality education at their multiple entry points. As teachers continue to look at student work products, they set targeted instructional goals and use individual conferences to ascertain viable means of addressing students' needs. Most lessons include scaffolded activities and tasks to meet students at their level of proficiency and move them towards challenging performance tasks. Students engage in discussions, debates, problem solving hands-on activities, and there are rotational work stations that facilitate independent work. However, a few teachers do not implement such practices strategically and do not incorporate extensions of curricula for all groups of students, such as students with disabilities and English language learners who struggle in maintaining a rigorous trajectory in their learning. Thus, although most students work independently for extended periods of time completing challenging tasks, thereby providing teachers with ample time to work one-on-one or in small groups with students in those subgroups who need additional support, work products for these students do not typically demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation in learning activities.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Laboratory School of Finance & Technology	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