

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Fordham High School for the Arts

High School 437

**500 East Fordham Road
Bronx
NY, 10458**

Principal: Iris Blige

**Dates of review: Dec 4 - 5, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Fordham High School for the Arts is a high school with 384 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33% Black, 63% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 42% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Careful attention to alignment of curricula to Common Core Learning Standards enables all students' engagement in cognitively rigorous tasks that prepare them for college and careers. (1.1)
 - Teachers who are well-focused on the school's major goal of ensuring that all students have equal access to rigorous content aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) work together consistently to adjust and improve curriculum maps in every subject area. Consequently, the school has revamped its entire English language arts and math curricula. English language arts curriculum maps now document rationale, embed performance assessments, and explain the ladder of complexity for each grade level, identifying specially selected texts from the Common Core library and Engage NY with additional emphasis on non-fiction and cross-discipline connections. Similarly, the math department revised its curricula to increase rigor through incorporating design of problems that draw on multiple standards exemplifying real world application, verbal and written justification, and fluency with complex numbers and problems. In addition, use of CCLS math practices, cross-content connections to science curriculum, and performance assessments, are built into each math unit. Furthermore, the school's instructional focus this year centering on the use of questioning and discussion strategies that enable students to write argumentatively and analyze texts has established coherence across grades and disciplines so that students read closely, question, analyze, and defend their thinking orally and in writing. Students attest that their courses are challenging and that their teachers are "integrating more writing and explaining" into their daily academic tasks. As a result the school has seen success, scoring in the 73rd and 97th percentile in City and peer groups respectively for percentage of students earning a Regents diploma. Moreover, on the rigorous college readiness four-year non-remediation index, the school scored in the 54th and 71st percentiles in City and peer groups respectively on its most recent Progress Report.
 - The school makes on-going modifications based on student work products and performance data to ensure curriculum access for all students, as reflected in the school's self-evaluation statement, "We do not lower the bar for rigor, rather we add more scaffolding to make it more accessible for all students especially our English language learners and students with disabilities." In addition to individual teacher modifications to engage all students, the school has identified several Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies within each unit curriculum map. Among those that have become regular school-wide practices are using an annotation strategy entitled RUN for read-underline-annotate, and using graphic organizers and peer editing. When ninth grade assessments revealed that students struggled with developing claims and refuting counterclaims, teachers introduced sentence starters and a discussion strategy known as "volleyball" requiring students to cite both sides of an argument. In a student self-reflection survey, one student identified the volleyball strategy as something that was going well, as it illuminated disagreements and created awareness that there are multiple ways to think and multiple answers. Such work has resulted in positive outcomes for special needs groups. The school achieved 69th and 88th percentile ranks for

City and peer groups respectively for four year graduation rates for students with disabilities and 89th and 91st percentile ranks in City and peer groups for four year graduation rates for Black and Hispanic males in the lowest third.

- Explicit communication of expectations empowers all constituencies to achieve, resulting in positive student outcomes. (3.4)
 - A comprehensive school staff handbook that begins with an empowering welcome emphasizing honor and commitment states requirements concisely for developing pedagogical practice. It clearly outlines all logistics and systems for operations, pedagogy, assessment, safety, professional development, and promotion of college and career readiness, among others, thus communicating the unwavering high expectations set forth by the principal. To support staff in understanding and execution of practices, the school conducts a yearly staff summer institute to give teachers time to think, plan, reflect, and review prior school year summative data. Frequent supervisor and lead teacher classroom visits with feedback based on the Danielson rubric, as well as recurrent supervisory reviews of lesson plans, and a weekly emailed bulletin, provide teachers with constant feedback and information reinforcing identified expectations. Teachers respond well to the numerous demands collectively assuming responsibility for student outcomes as evidenced by the manner in which teachers conduct post-assessment analysis reflections after administration of each unit, mid-term, final, and Regents exam. Teachers continually reflect on prior preparation, emerging needs, pedagogical improvements, and strategies to communicate results to students, thus ensuring that new action plans are comprehensive enough to improve future outcomes. As a result teachers clearly understand expectations.
 - Cohort orientations to high school life, scheduled teacher office hours for student academic support, summer assignments, and a “Go-Blue” campaign which encourages students to exceed requirements for graduation, promote the development of persistence and resilience as pathways to college and career readiness. Additionally, the school has a designated college/career counselor, software for students to track their college application progress, and a college-center resource room for students and their families, which students and parents laud as helpful in learning options, monitoring credits and grades earned and keeping on track to meet deadlines for all college application components. In addition, the school partners with universities to provide college nights, college level courses and college intern mentors to support students’ logistical and emotional preparation for college and career. Savvy analysis of past college readiness metrics influenced the school to raise expectations of all stakeholders and review course offerings for all students to increase numbers of college-ready students and acceptances into distinguished schools of higher learning. As a result the school increased both its graduation and weighted Regents’ pass rates, and 37% of its last graduating class also achieved an arts endorsement on their diploma.
- A culture defined by trust and commitment to scholarship fosters a positive and safe learning environment that promotes the academic and social-emotional growth of students and staff. (1.4)
 - The principal identifies the school’s theory of action as adult engagement with students. She explains that “children feel welcome

and protected”, because “teachers go the extra mile for their kids coming in on Saturdays, staying after school without pay”, and “conducting office hours with students during their lunch periods”. Purposeful efforts that build this warm and supportive environment allows students to take risks in both academic and arts courses, the end result of which have paid off. Students express confidence in performances in their chosen talent and excel in academic coursework to maintain their participation in art majors. Students affirmed the comment of their peer who stated that, “Teachers really care and want to push you to be the best you can.” Academically, to support student self-expression, teachers crafted a specific list of sentence starters that encourage students to speak freely and share opinions in classroom discussions. Additionally, the school instituted teacher evaluation surveys that students complete twice weekly to provide teachers with feedback on lessons. Hence, student voice is taken seriously and contributes to school improvement decisions. Responding to feedback that students wanted to read more modern texts, English language arts teachers adjusted a unit on Sophocles and Aristotle, inserting the novel “God of Carnage” to accomplish the same objectives. In addition, teachers use the surveys to monitor students’ evaluation of instructional strategies. Teachers report that these practices have merited “huge strides in student engagement”. Additionally, weekly pupil personnel meetings and daily monitoring of students’ well-being, attendance, and teacher anecdotal logs, assure that school staff make targeted interventions on behalf of students. As a result, cutting is almost non-existent, suspensions to date are at less than 1% of total students and attendance is at 94.2%.

- Strategic administrative decisions support long-term instructional goals that enable students to achieve rigorous academic and arts performance standards. (1.3)
 - In the face of limitations of shared campus space and diminishing budgets, the school proactively seeks grants that have empowered the building of a theater, music suite, visual arts room, and college room, supporting the schools’ foci on arts education and college and career readiness. As a result, students have dedicated spaces that mirror the milieus of their specific art disciplines enabling professional real-world learning experiences. Additionally, the school forms strategic arts partnerships that provide students with opportunities for work-based learning in arts internships that support the school’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) track in drama. The school’s partnership with iLearn NYC established virtual advanced placement courses, tripling options for students’ higher learning, resulting in improved college and career readiness scores on the school’s progress report. Furthermore, the principal increased teacher participation in the Teacher Leadership Program (TLP), expanding lead teacher positions from two to five. As a result, all teachers benefit from feedback they receive from the lead teachers who chair teacher teams and guide curriculum modification successfully to meet the more demanding CCLS performance standards. The school’s decision to work with a professional partner and to institute a yearly musical theater component propels teachers to draw upon relevant themes to create cross-disciplinary curricula so that all students benefit by making real-life connections across subject disciplines. For example, students in a tenth grade global studies class analyzed film clips and musical lyrics to discuss and debate how art serves as a reflection and commentary on Germany’s Weimar Republic, enriching learning around their upcoming

production of Cabaret. Such strategic use of resources, personnel, and partnerships sustains meaningful engagement of students, supporting the school's long-term goals of successful graduation and rigorous engagement in the study of the arts and academic core subjects. The school's success is evident in its four year graduation rate of 84.8% placing the school in the 94th percentile of its peer group and placing it overall in the 96th percentile as compared to schools Citywide on the total Progress Report score.

- Teacher teams meet several times weekly to study curriculum and inform pedagogy adjustments focusing on the goals of increasing Regents pass rate at college-ready standards. They work with the assistant principal to leverage the school schedule to create 75 minute instructional blocks so that students have sustained engagement in tasks that demand critical justification and rigorous questioning. The principal credits the staff's astute work and the new extended periods as contributing to a 27% increase in Algebra pass rates this past year with an overall 90% pass rate.
- Frequent professional collaboration promotes teacher leadership in driving improvements in student learning. (4.2)
 - Valuing the integral role of staff in creating a vibrant learning community, school administration develops schedules to accommodate common planning times, outlines goals for team work in the school's professional development plan, and appoints and supports both core and elective arts teachers as leads to build capacity school-wide. Consequently, teachers value and embrace the CCLS, speaking in positive terms about the challenges of their work. This has produced coherence school-wide in tackling implementation of CCLS shifts as teams use an inquiry approach to identify specific needs, such as improving vocabulary and evidence-based writing, of both English language learners and students with disabilities, thus improving performance for all students. As a result of embedded distributive leadership, teachers develop their capacity on an on-going basis and contribute to key decisions. A former teacher now serves as a well-respected assistant principal and the input, work, and grant writing of staff members have influenced significant program and scheduling modifications that support improved learning outcomes, construction of arts studios, arts residencies, and College Technical Education (CTE) pathway certifications in the arts. In addition, lead teachers organize inter-visitations within and across departments, and evaluate pedagogy by facilitating valuable peer-to-peer feedback using the Danielson rubric, resulting in pedagogical growth which is tracked and published in on-going data analysis summaries. (a,c)

What the school needs to improve

- Leverage existing pedagogical strengths to further develop and refine practices that support belief systems to actively engage all learners. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, teachers use the Danielson rubric as a compass to guide work in increasing student engagement, supporting the school's instructional focus on debate and discussion, and developing argumentative writing skills using concise textual evidence. Thus, teachers carefully follow lesson plans and faithfully implement a variety of literacy strategies that increase student participation in cognitively challenging

academic work. However, many teachers have limited on-the-job experience and are still grappling with the complexities of using strategies tactically rather than letting strategies drive pedagogy. At times, teachers allow students to speak on a topic at length using the “volleyball” strategy in which students explain their thinking and pass the “ball” to a peer, missing opportunities to stop and question students’ thinking strategically and to challenge others to do the same. Additionally, teachers sometimes summarize discussions diminishing opportunity for students to synthesize the information. Thus, although pedagogy is successfully planned and refined, the full engagement of students, whereby they have multiple opportunities for deeper thinking, is sometimes not fully implemented, thereby limiting students from reaching their highest potential levels of performance.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Fordham High School for the Arts	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score				X

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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

To what extent does the school...	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

To what extent does the school...	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
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