



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Ron Brown Academy

Middle School 16K057

**125 Stuyvesant Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Celeste Douglas

**Date of review: December 17, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Kristine Mustillo**

The School Context

Ron Brown Academy is a middle school with 180 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 72% Black, 26% Hispanic, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Focus	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices reflect the belief that students learn best through active engagement with rigorous content. Teaching strategies are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and the instructional shifts are strategically utilized to make curricula accessible and cognitively engaging for all learners.

Impact

Teacher practice in utilizing instructional strategies that support learning for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, lead to student cognitive engagement in rigorous tasks and high-level discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- In a 6th grade math class, students were observed working in leveled groups to explore summer job rates of pay. Group problems were scaffolded using varying levels of complex data. One group explored a job with a flat weekly rate, a second job had a salary that increased with longevity and a third had a base rate with commission. Students graphed their data and answered computation questions and word problems based on their job. Students then participated in a jig saw discussion with peers from other groups to discuss how they same strategies were applied with increasing complexity and determine what summer job would be most beneficial financially.
- An 8th grade social studies class was engaged in analyzing the credibility of source documents related to the Philippines-American War. Students used organizers to collect strong and weak evidence along with their reasoning. Students worked on questions at Spy, Warrior, Ninja and Spy Warrior Ninja Jedi levels. Each level asked students to explore hypotheses around the treatment of war hostages, state their claims, support with evidence as well as assess the credibility of their sources, and address counter claims. The extension for the Spy Warrior Ninja Jedi level asked students to go beyond hypotheses and evidence discussed in class, and engage in independent study.
- Across grade levels and content areas, teachers embedded opportunities for student conversation and strategically selected questions and strategies to support student talk. teacher practice evidences a focus on questioning and discussion, and the use of student data to plan for flexible groups to ensure that rigorous content is accessible to all learners.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school has systems and structures in place to consistently communicate high expectations to parents and students, as well as guidance and advisement supports to ensure student progress towards those expectations. However, while parents receive information regarding student progress, fully embedded home-school partnerships are not yet evident.

Impact

Parent partnerships have not yet been fully developed. Although students are aware of expectations and their next learning steps, they are not yet engaged in the collaborative development of planning their education experience.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum night is held at the beginning of each new marking period to explain the curriculum to parents. However, parents are not yet engaged in experiencing the curriculum, and lack a clear understanding of what the expectations for student work look like at each level.
- Parents receive progress reports in between each report card, and have access to student grades on classwork and homework through Engrade, on on-line grading system. Teachers and administration have regular parent outreach once a week to discuss student successes and challenges.
- High expectations are in place for student behavior. A school-wide behavior plan recognizes students for academic performance, progress, grit, optimism, leadership, zest, curiosity and gratitude.
- Students expressed an understanding of expectations for school work and refer to rubrics and the actionable feedback provided by teachers for next steps. Students receive guidance in reviewing credit accumulation, and support if they are not meeting academic expectations. However, although students use peer review and self-reflection across classrooms, they are still learning to create actionable and measurable next steps for themselves and students are not yet involved in planning and preparing for their next educational level.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula across grades and content are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and are planned refined using student work and assessment data.

Impact

Curricula across grades and content is cognitively engaging, integrates the instructional shifts, and promotes College and Career Readiness (CCR) for all learners, ensuring student access and engagement in rigorous curricula and tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and administration participate in collaborative planning sessions in the spring to develop the following year's instructional plans. Using Common Core and student performance data, teachers adjust and refine plans. By August, the first unit in each content area is complete. Teachers participate in weekly sessions to review plans along with student work and performance data. Saturday planning sessions take place near the end of one unit to plan the following to select skills that need to be spiraled into the next unit based on student information. The faculty also discusses alternate delivery methods for content.
- Unit tasks consistently ask students to demonstrate the ability to synthesize, evaluate and apply information. For example, social studies units on slavery and American imperialism, asked students to evaluate the credibility of primary and secondary source information, form opinions around topics, defend positions supporting their claims and addressing counter claims and make connections to current world events. An English language arts unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird* explored character motivations and theme, and asked students to support their thesis with text based evidence.
- Extensions and scaffolds are embedded in each lesson plan, and implemented or removed based on classroom checks for understanding. All lessons are planned in a format that includes a *do now*, mini-lesson\teacher modeling, tiered group work, share, and exit ticket completion. Social studies lessons planned for tiered questioning. Math lessons provided evidence of tiered math problems, and planned for jigsaw groups to ensure that students would be exposed to working through a skill at several levels. English language arts plans utilized graphic organizers and questioning to support and extend content exploration. All lessons plans reviewed provided for flexible grouping and re-teaching. Support staff participates in curricula planning sessions. Lesson planning addresses academic as well as social emotional growth and college and career readiness skills. Students have built in supports to promote self-regulation if needed. Structures are in place within plans to provide opportunities for students to collaborate with peers on tasks. Turn and talk, jigsaw protocols, debates, Socratic seminars and roles assignment are embedded throughout plans to promote communication skills. In addition, college and career readiness skills are supported through the schools positive behavior system, along with classroom instruction.

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms teachers use and create common assessments, Assessment practices consistently incorporate the use of ongoing checks for understanding and self and peer reflection.

Impact

Teacher collaboration on data analysis leads to clear portraits of student mastery level. Students receive actionable feedback from teachers regarding performance, and are aware of their next learning steps, leading to growth in student performance.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a school-wide grading policy based on a combination of classwork, homework and formal assessments. Students who are not yet meeting expectations for course work are expected to review their performance and attendance with the guidance counselor, who also participates in collaborative planning sessions to ensure that classroom instruction addresses academic needs as well as personal growth. Students may have individualized academic and/or personal growth plans depending upon their performance.
- In classrooms, teachers use ongoing checks for understanding during lessons and at the conclusion of the lesson. Exits tickets are leveled and spiral as the unit progresses to assess depth of understanding. Exit tickets are used to plan for student grouping as well as lesson modification to assess if select skills and strategies need to be revisited in upcoming lessons. Teachers were observed using check-ins during the *do now* and mini-lesson, and using the formative data to pair students and provide for re-teaching in small groups. In a 7th grade math class studying linear relationships, the teacher used a *Fist to Five* strategy following the mini-lesson to assess student understanding, and utilized the formative data to create pairs for the practice activity and a small group for re-teaching.
- Rubrics are standardized in humanities for grammar, mechanics and structures, but differ for content expectations. Math rubrics are aligned across the grades and levels. Across content areas, rubrics are consistently used to set expectations for tasks, for student self and peer reflection, and for final grading with specific feedback and next steps. In an 8th grade English language arts class, students engaged in the peer editing process using a standardized rubric to provide peers with feedback in the form of glows and grows regarding the organization and analysis for each paragraph of an essay exploring literary theme. Students then had an opportunity to self-reflect on their work using the rubric and feedback.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers engage in structured professional collaborations and the analysis of assessment data, student work, and in shared reflection on teacher practice.

Impact

School-wide professional collaboration support improved teacher practice and growth in student performance through a focus on instructional coherence. High quality instructional practice and student progress is evident across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The work of teacher teams has resulted in a common instructional approach as well as coherence across grades and content areas. For example, teachers collaboratively developed the lesson plan format, which includes a do now, mini-lesson, group work, share, learning targets, essential questions, exit ticket, scaffolds and extensions.
- Regular reflection on practice and review of student performance results in teacher teams continually exploring resources. Administrators are regular and active participants in teacher team meetings, and all initiatives are collaboratively discussed and explored. For example, teacher team work has led to the creation of spiraled exit slips and the implementation of the Blitz intervention program to support emerging readers.
- Formal and informal observations provide evidence of strengthened practice in the Danielson Framework for Teaching Domain 3 (Instruction), which is a focus for the school. In the first round of observations, eight teachers were observed and given feedback. In the last round, seven out of eight teachers made progress, with six rated effective or highly effective in this practice. In these observation reports, improvements were noted in engaging students in learning through the use of questioning skills and tiered tasks.
- The math content team utilized an item skills analysis to track math performance on benchmark assessments. Item analyses are consistently tracked and used to plan instruction. As of the last assessment, 67% of students had made progress. In addition, all teachers utilize an exit slip tracker to monitor daily skill acquisition. This information is utilized in teacher planning for rigorous tasks that build on student performance levels.