



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**The Benjamin Franklin Health and Science
Academy**

K157

**850 Kent Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11205**

Principal: Maribel Hulla

**Date of review: December 4, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Alicja Winnicki**

The School Context

The Benjamin Franklin Health and Science Academy is a Kindergarten to grade 8 school with 558 students from Kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 18% Black, 79% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.3%.

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	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

**3.4 High
Expectations**

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders constantly communicate high expectations for instruction and create structured opportunities for professional learning and support. The school successfully partners with families to guide student progress towards next steps and benchmarks.

Impact

The school's culture of mutual accountability for student progress and improved teaching practices is a result of effective communication of high expectations and supportive structures to achieve them.

Supporting Evidence

- Guided by the Citywide Instructional Expectations, the school's professional development plan for the first four months of the school year sets the instructional agenda for all teachers and strategically embeds high expectations for teaching and culture, including planning coherence and character education.
- School goals and expectations for instruction and increased student achievement are collaboratively developed and presented in a form of thinking maps endorsing the school's initiative to promote student high-order thinking and engagement in support of the school's instructional focus. For example, the alignment of the school's expectations with the Six Elements of the Chancellor's Capacity Framework provides a clear road map for the school's success and anticipates the implementation of effective practices such as student led conversations and higher-order questioning.
- Frequent classroom observations with feedback, inclusive of next steps, are strategically scheduled and hold teachers and leaders accountable for meeting the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching.
- Monthly parent workshops, "High Tea Parent Chats", grade level newsletters, and on-site collaboration with the Office of Adult Education give families opportunities to learn about the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards and every day instruction. For example, the school held an orientation session about expectations in literacy this year and upon high demand from parents, a math session is scheduled next so teachers may explain the curriculum and benchmarks, and equip parents with strategies to help their children to meet them. Similarly, parents from middle grades receive helpful hints on how to support student transitions through high school to college and careers.
- Parents shared that teachers and leaders partner with them to support their children's learning. They regularly send updates on their children's progress via monthly progress reports, report cards, phone and email outreach to ensure families receive guidance and support. The school's bilingual parent coordinator collaborates with the school psychologist and the guidance department and provides resources and workshops on helping children with test anxieties, in addition to academic supports. The school also ensures that all information is translated to Spanish to facilitate smooth communication and understanding of feedback and next steps.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to the school's curricula, reflect common beliefs and provide consistent instructional supports, including scaffolds and questioning. The use of strategic extensions fostering high-order thinking demonstrated in challenging tasks and discussions varies across the school.

Impact

Across classrooms, consistent multiple entry points support student engagement and participation in lessons, yet there are some missed opportunities for all learners to fully exercise and apply critical and analytical thinking and high levels of involvement in discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers promote active student engagement in learning and participation in discussions through the implementation of reciprocal teaching and Socratic seminars in upper grades and by providing students in lower grades with opportunities to work in flexible groups to discuss tasks. Students have opportunities to participate in debates and discourses that are promoted by the Middle School Quality Initiative.
- During an English language arts lesson in grade 6 student partnerships engaged in discussions and writing about central ideas and their significance from "*Dreams from My Father*" by Barack Obama. They used a 3-step self-monitoring checklist to stay on task and graphic organizers as scaffolds for analysis of the text. Students also articulated that partner work helps them to stay on task and gain someone else's perspective in interpreting the author's thoughts.
- In all classrooms visited, students consistently participated in group work and were provided with graphic organizers, manipulatives and discussion stems. Yet questions and tasks in some classrooms are solely generated by teachers.
- Conversations with students indicated that they routinely work in groups and have opportunities to productively struggle with solving problems and finding solutions, However extensions to the lessons did not fully engage higher achieving students. Classroom visits revealed that although all students are engaged in discussions about tasks, accelerated learners have limited opportunities to extend their thinking beyond the assignment.
- In one math class students worked in groups deliberately designed by levels to solve two-digit by numbers by two-digit addition word problems. Some students solved problems with partners, while the teacher guided a group of identified students with using the bar model. Even though some students were asked to create their own word problems, the extensions to learning did not afford students deeper connection between the concepts and real world application to push their thinking beyond the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate instructional shifts. Higher-order skills are consistently emphasized for all learners across grades and subjects.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions are purposeful to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Academic tasks are designed to push student thinking across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of the English language arts and content area curricula across grades reveal that teachers and leaders plan units of study with emphasis on instructional shifts, specifically balancing the informational and literary text, academic vocabulary, fluency, multi-step problem solving, close reading and text-based responses. Science and social studies units integrate reading, writing, speaking and language standards.
- The Word Generation program, part of the Middle School Quality Initiative, is coherently infused in upper grades promoting the development of academic and content vocabulary as part of the college and career preparation for all students. For example, students in middle grades study focus words in the context of reading, writing and debating social issues.
- Unit plans show that the school utilizes Core Curriculum programs, such as Ready Gen, Go Math, the Scholastic Code X, and the new Social Studies Scope and Sequence to create rigorous academic tasks. Literacy units of study in grade 8, for example, include tasks asking all students to write argumentative essays to defend or refute a claim or to provide objective summaries with analysis of central ideas, while in Social Studies students analyze documents to draw conclusions. All unit plans feature higher level questions for discussions and written responses.
- Lesson and unit plans demonstrate that teachers across grades and subjects plan numerous scaffolds and entry points for all students. For example, science units indicate the use of think-alouds, frontloading essential vocabulary, appropriate wait time and reciprocal teaching strategies for English language learners.
- All units and lessons consistently include a menu of strategies for students to apply and practice higher order thinking skills in academic tasks. Thinking maps, strategy group instruction, pictorials, leveled texts and power point presentations are on the lists of multiple entry points to engage all learners.

Findings

Teachers and leaders purposefully use common assessments aligned to curricula in all subjects and consistently track student progress toward goals. Deliberate curricular and instructional adjustments to meet all students' learning needs vary across classrooms.

Impact

The school uses assessment results in actionable feedback to students and monitoring student growth, yet daily adjustments to lessons sometimes miss opportunities to raise all students' awareness of their next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school publishes the assessments calendar for the year. This calendar includes baseline and benchmark performance tasks for literacy and math, and weekly and unit tests that are aligned to the content curricula. Additionally, teachers routinely use standards based rubrics for tasks and provide students with “glow and grow” actionable feedback as evident in student work in writing. They also create rubrics for student engagement in reciprocal reading groups. School leaders embed student achievement results in their feedback observations.
- Reading running records and Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) are administered several times a year to monitor student growth. Classroom visits and interviews with students and teachers revealed that these assessments, in addition to checklists and rubrics, are also used to group students for instruction and to promote deeper understanding of unit goals.
- Although all teachers consistently monitor their students' progress on benchmark and unit tests and record next steps for each student as evident on class tracking sheets, this information and data are not always intentionally used in daily lessons and units. In one class, for example, a teacher strategically grouped students and gave differentiated tasks to solve subtraction problems after probing students on their use of problem solving strategies. In another class, however, students, including English language learners, worked in partnerships to solve the same word problems and a teacher continued with a lesson plan, the same materials and a task without making modifications based on student expressed misconceptions or mastery of the skill.
- While teachers give students opportunities to self or peer assess their work, classroom visits and conversations with students revealed that sometimes students are not aware of their next learning steps. Some math teachers, for example, prompt students to explain strategies they chose to solve problems in a self-reflection after a math test. Similarly, teachers utilize thinking map checklists and students self-assess their learning and work. Some students, however, expressed confusion about next steps in completion of tasks or next steps in lessons.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers have multiple opportunities to engage in professional collaborations to work towards the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. These structures promote shared leadership for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and instruction.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved teacher pedagogy and capacity in planning. Teachers have a voice in decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet regularly to plan units and lessons in alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, all teachers participate in the school's collaborative professional learning groups to refine their instructional practices.
- All teachers have opportunities to meet in vertical and horizontal structures to discuss the school's instructional initiatives and goals. Content area 7th and 8th grade teachers, including an English as a second language teacher, meet regularly to discuss the implementation of thinking maps in the context of the Core Curriculum programs. They also share how to better engage students, including English language learners (ELLs), through the use of scaffolds, such as bilingual glossaries or graphic organizers, or strategies like reciprocal teaching.
- Teachers lead team meetings and prepare agendas for collaborative inquiry, grade and content conferences. They also provide professional development for colleagues. The upper grade English as a second language teacher, for example, prepared training on the use of specific strategies to build academic vocabulary with ELLs.
- The leadership empowers teachers to make instructional decisions and invites them to provide input in the implementation of the new Core Curriculum programs such as Ready Gen and the Scholastic Code X. Interviews with teachers revealed they are trusted with making adjustments to unit plans, tasks and instruction. Grade 5 teachers, for example, decided on a power point presentation in lieu of an essay about deforestation for identified students in order to ensure strategic scaffolds for paragraph writing.