



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Foundations Academy

High School K322

**70 Tompkins Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Neil Monheit

**Date of review: April 29, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael Alcott**

The School Context

Foundations Academy is a high school with 102 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 68% Black, 28% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 38% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 72.0%.

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	Developing
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	Developing
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	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Developing
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	Celebration	Developing

Area of Celebration

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

Since February, all teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations using an inquiry approach that is still in an emergent phase. Distributive leadership practices are developing to support leadership capacity-building.

Impact

Teachers are collectively building their capacity to identify and address gaps in student skills. The impact on teacher practice and student progress has yet to be realized.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers in the school serve on one of two teacher teams that have each identified a group of students who attend school regularly but are not meeting expectations for their learning. The teams are currently led by an assistant principal and the principal. Each team targets specific writing skills aligned to the Judith Hochman approach to writing, which focuses on the building of complex sentence writing skills and tracks mastery of those skills. For example, students are explicitly taught conjunctions and subordinate clauses within each content area. Differentiated scaffolds are planned as students build mastery of these writing skills. Curricular and instructional decisions are made as a result of the findings from the students' work.
- The instructional cabinet is developing protocols for mirroring the inquiry process at the leadership level by looking at teacher practice, using subcomponents of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, in February, the administrative team looked at specific attributes of teacher practice within Danielson's components 1e (Designing Coherent Instruction) and 3c (Engaging Students in Learning), identified gaps in areas such as embedding multiple entry points into tasks, implementing purposeful groupings, and mastering effective pacing of the lesson. The agendas and notes from the March cabinet inquiry meetings that followed, focused on helping teachers to develop lessons with multiple entry points. Supported by School Renewal coaches, this process of using Danielson aligned tools to monitor and improve teacher practice is intended to strengthen school-wide understanding of the inquiry process.
- An experienced science teacher assumed the role of coaching her Integrated Co-teaching team (ICT) partner. However, such strategic collegial pairings have not been initiated for other teachers across the school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teacher practices inconsistently provide multiple entry points into lessons to support all learners. Class discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teaching practices do not regularly offer students ample opportunities to fully engage in learning tasks via multiple pathways that support them in producing quality work products. There are uneven levels of student engagement, thinking, and participation during lessons.

Supporting Evidence

- In three out of eight classes, multiple entry points were evident in the form of visual aids or support for students, by paraprofessionals. A social studies teacher provided bilingual support to English Language Learners via small group conferencing in Spanish, while other students worked independently. In most classrooms students had to complete the same task and students who finished early sat waiting without an opportunity to engage in an extension activity. For example, in an English class, while ten of nineteen students had finished the task and were having private conversations with peers, two students had not yet engaged in the task and seven were on task.
- In the majority of classes, students' cognitive engagement with the work was inconsistent. For example, in a carousel activity in a social studies class, most students were engaged in completing the graphic organizer but were unable to articulate how it connects to the learning objective or the purpose for which they were organizing information. During partner discussions in another social studies class, students neither annotated the text nor cited evidence from it when responding to the prompt.
- Evidence of purposeful teacher moves to promote peer to peer student talk was evident in four out of eight classrooms. In three of these classrooms, teachers asked students to turn and talk with a partner. In one math class, the teacher used cold calling and informed students that she would come back to them when they did not have a response. Students' responses in that class evidenced their expectation that the teacher calls on non-volunteers and expects a response. For example, one student voluntarily responded after initially not having any response. In the other four classes observed, there were no purposeful teacher moves nor was there evidence of authentic student to student discussion.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and building coherence across grades and departments. Curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize higher order skills and rigorous habits for all students.

Impact

The school has not yet implemented demanding curricula that provide all students with access to rigorous tasks, across grades and subject areas, which promote college and career readiness for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is adapting Engage NY modules in English language arts and math and has adopted social studies curriculum from New Visions and a high school with a strong track record of student achievement in social studies. In addition, the school has relied on its network team for support in building detailed curriculum maps in the sciences. The science maps include learning objectives, content, assessments, instructional strategies, and necessary resources.
- In an effort to build consistency in curriculum planning, the school leader asked teachers to address what students will learn, pedagogical strategies to be used, media types, and evidence of learning, when planning lessons. However, lesson plans show that teachers are at different stages in thinking about and using this protocol. For example, while the United States History and Government lesson plan addressed these considerations with some specificity, the Global History lesson plan addressed some of the questions with less specificity, and the lesson plan for an Integrated Algebra class did not illustrate guiding questions.
- The Principal has offered training to teachers to support coherent instructional planning, the designing of rigorous tasks, and alignment of curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards. Lesson plans viewed showed some applications of this training. For example, both social studies lesson plans demonstrated alignment between the learning objective, the strategy for achieving that objective, and the materials to be used. The Integrated Algebra lesson plan summarized lesson activities by asking a procedural question aligned to the learning objective and a conceptual question aligned to the Essential Question.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing the use of assessments and grading policies to provide staff and students with actionable feedback toward goals across grades and subject areas. Teacher assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

The school's developing assessment practices and inconsistencies in teachers' use of assessment data, limit positive impact of assessment data on classroom instruction and students' self-assessment.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's assessment program includes a common grading policy, common rubrics and other assessment tools. However, while some students are able to articulate how rubrics are used to assess and further their learning, the majority of students interviewed were unable to articulate the school's grading policy. Several also reported that they were infrequent users of the school's student grade management system, which offers access to feedback on all students' performance across content areas.
- Feedback to students based on rubrics is not consistently actionable or reflective of the specific task shown in the students' work. For example, teacher feedback on a student's math work read, "Come to class regularly." Feedback on a science project read, "You lacked in-depth analysis of trends/patterns in your weather map." An English assignment lacked rubric and feedback to students whose work was viewed during the Quality Review.
- Teachers' checks for understanding were observed in some classes. In an algebra class, the teacher used cold calling and later returned to the student who was unable to respond initially. In an ICT science classroom both teachers actively circulated, asked questions to assess students' understanding, and provided support accordingly. In contrast, there was no assessment of student work in a geometry class where the teacher distributed the exit ticket and then immediately started working on it with the whole class, without giving students an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. In a social studies ICT class, although both teachers circulated, assessment of student work was limited to assignment completion.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Through various efforts led by school leaders, the school is developing in communicating to students and families, expectations connected to college and career readiness. Feedback and guidance supports are developing the level of detail needed to help students for the next level.

Impact

Students have an understanding of promotional and high school commencement requirements and expectations. However, all students do not yet consistently demonstrate awareness of a connection between the work they do in class and expectations for college and career readiness, as well as high expectations for their personal and academic behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have implemented systems and practices to communicate the requirements for promotion and graduation and to assist students and families in tracking their progress. One innovative practice is a “Passport to College” ceremony in which students receive stamped, personalized “passports,” tracking completion of credits and other requirements toward graduation. The counselor meets with students on a monthly basis to discuss transcript and report card progress. The school uses an in-house “monetary” rewards system to promote positive academic and personal behaviors. The school also uses Jupiter grades to communicate progress to students and families.
- The efforts of school leaders to communicate high expectations for college and career readiness were not consistently mirrored by teachers or reflected in comments made by students. There were few examples of student work and projects and teacher feedback to help students get to the next level was inconsistent across grades. In interviews, students’ comments included, “I am ahead in all my classes. They just keep me busy,” “I always finish my work and then just wait,” and “I am not sure what my next steps are.” The majority of students interviewed stated that they did not regularly check the online grading system to monitor their progress. Additionally, the majority of students communicated that they did not take advantage of the in-house “monetary” incentive system. The two parents present for the parent meeting also indicated that they had not checked the online grading system to view data on their child’s performance.
- Feedback and advisement supports are beginning to develop the level of detail and clarity needed to prepare students for the next level. Seniors have access to advisory sessions in which teachers implement an in house curriculum, with students currently working on tasks such as drafting their college essays. Students are given feedback by their guidance counselor who uses an online data base to inform them of their progress towards graduation; however school data seen during the Quality Review indicated that only 8 out of 35 seniors are on track to meet expectations for graduation.