Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Life Academy High School for Film and Music

High School K559

2630 Benson Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11214

Principal: Lisa Ferraiola

Date of review: April 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit

The School Context

Life Academy HS for Film and Music is a high school with 260 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 51% Black, 27% Hispanic, 14% White, 7% Asian students and 1% other. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 85.1%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Celebration**	**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	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Well Developed**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
School leaders and faculty continuously refine and revise curricula to ensure alignment to the Common Core standards and the instructional shifts, and develop in students rigorous work habits and higher order thinking skills. The curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
As a result, instructional coherence is established across grades and content areas, all learners have opportunities to be cognitively engaged, demonstrate their thinking, and have access to the curricula and tasks.

Supporting Evidence
- School leaders and faculty emphasize key standards and skills in the content areas and foster complex thinking and application of knowledge learned through Depth of Knowledge (DOK) leveled questions. All of the lesson and unit plans reviewed offered evidence of differentiated questions (DOK levels 1-3). In every lesson, a connection activity is developed to involve students in answering a DOK level 2 and/or 3 prompt with an opportunity to assess their work during the time allotted. Students are also offered choice in the process or product during the lesson, all of which promote college and career readiness and access to the curricula.

- Coherence and rigor are fostered through the ABC (agree, build upon, challenge) system instituted in every grade and content area and the use of the 6 Strategies for Implementation (toss/talk, thumb/hand/stand, ABC cups, dry-erase paddles, ABC corners, silent conversations). These strategies/systems promote student access and engagement into the curricula with opportunities to clarify and/or challenge content as a whole group, in small groups or with a partner.

- Teachers use a lesson template that promotes agreed-upon components of a lesson (essential questions, standards, connection activity, leveled DOK questions, mini lesson, work period, closure and opportunities to list multiple entry points). This sequencing allows students to move from literal comprehension to higher level thinking work within a lesson and gives teachers opportunities to infuse multiple entry points throughout the components. For example, in an English plan, we see these following leveled DOK questions: DOK 1 – Who reveals the identity of Romeo and Juliet to one another? DOK 2- What qualms do Romeo and Juliet have about each other's identity? DOK 3 – Should a person always follow their gut instinct?

- Based on student work and data, this year, administrators and teachers added 2 literacy skills to be assessed in students' Common Core portfolios and thus reinforced in lessons. Moreover, all units have been refined or revised. Curricular adjustments were made in science to include a learning plan for teachers which consist of daily suggestions for lessons. In addition, in ELA, essential questions and instructional tasks were streamlined to focus on key skills. These and other adjustments have contributed to increased student progress school wide. The school has gone from an F, four years ago, to a D to now meeting its targets.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teacher practices also provide strategies to serve as entry points for challenging tasks and student discussions.

Impact
Tasks, work products and classroom discussions engage students and allow them to demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation, additional planning can support students across the vast majority of classrooms to reach high levels of ownership of the work.

Supporting Evidence
- Lessons are implemented so that students are engaged in rigorous, grade-level, real world work. In an English class, they were writing through the perspective of a character to make a case using textual evidence for why that character from Othello needed the support of a life coach the most. In a math class, students were asked to determine which shape (circle, rectangle, or triangle) would allow for the most parking spots given certain dimensions for the spots. In film, they were asked to determine which types of shots would best convey the emotion assigned to them, again using evidence from the pictures. Because these tasks were grounded in the standards, infused real world application and asked students to make their thinking visible, across these classrooms, students were engaged in high levels of thinking and participation.

- Students also have opportunities to produce meaningful work products. In another English class, students had the choice to write in their journal about whether they agreed or disagreed with advice given to "Jill" (a character made up by the teacher) or to write about whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement "It is not about what a person can do for you, it is about the way they make you feel". Once they made their choice, students had to write their position statement, give evidence to support it, analyze the evidence and complete a self-assessment sheet for which they were assessing their use of evidence/elaboration.

  Although across classrooms students were engaged in rigorous and grade appropriate work, a few students' levels of engagement could have reflected more active participation and ownership of the work. In a science class, students were seated at two tables (7 students at each table). The teacher did not circulate or hear everyone's thoughts. In order to ensure all students were accountable for the work, a group discussion rubric or guide could have been given to them with roles and expectations. In another class, while the students who were participating in the class discussion were passionate about what they were saying, some of the students did not share their answers to the question "what is the difference between a dream and a lucid dream?"

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and allow for tracking progress towards goals, ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Consequently, these assessment tools provide actionable feedback to teachers and students and allow teachers to make effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's Common Core portfolio rubrics were created to establish a consistent and formalized process for monitoring checks for understanding. In all content areas except in math, students are assessed based on these 7 literacy skills: stating a position, elaborating, ability to analyze text, presenting counterclaims, reading, organization, conventions. The last two were added this school year based on teacher analysis of students' performance on their writing assignments. In math, the mathematical practices are assessed through a similar portfolio. This year, the school added a self-assessment component which students say is a part of the portfolio that they regularly use in class. According to them, self-assessment happens every day in most classes. Using students' work products and self-assessments, teachers then are able to give students actionable feedback regarding their achievement and progress.

- Another tool used to assess students during the lessons is the ABC (agree, build upon and challenge) system. Students or groups of students get points based on the validity of their agreement or challenge. When a student agrees and makes a case for why s/he does, s/he receives one point for participation. When s/he successfully challenges a point, s/he can receive three points. Students receive two points for effectively building upon another's point. This allows teachers to continuously check for understanding and allows students to be accountable for their participation in class.

- The school also has a data specialist who continuously analyzes and shares data first with the school leadership team and then with teachers. Data regularly analyzed are from the Regents exams, MOSL assessments and the portfolios. These have provided actionable feedback to teachers and informed their decisions around the rubrics they develop and refine and the adjustments they make for students. Data analyses have brought about the following changes: refinement of the Common Core portfolios, instituting the ABC system to ensure teachers are using on-going checks for understanding throughout lessons, developing and listing leveled DOK questions in plans to move students from surface to deep thinking, among others.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and students and provide the supports needed to meet those expectations. School leaders and staff also communicate high expectations connected to a path to college and careers to students and their families.

Impact
Consequently, teachers and staff establish a culture of learning and of mutual accountability that communicates a unified set of expectations. Students and families are aware of their next steps and progress towards those expectations.

- **Supporting Evidence** Teachers share that the school leader and the professional learning team ensure that all staff are fully informed of the expectations as well as implement them in their practice. Professional development is offered by coaches and teachers to support the implementation of agreed upon practices such as the Common Core portfolio and the ABC system. Instructional rounds occur weekly during which teachers participate and receive differentiated learning experiences. Additionally, agendas, sign-in sheets and instructional rounds findings reports all provide evidence of the ways in which teachers are supported with the implementation of the school's foci on the Danielson Framework for Teaching components 3b, 3c and 3d.

- Teacher feedback is also a way in which the administrators and coaches support teacher practice in meeting the expectations set. During the teacher interviews, teachers spoke about the ways in which they receive feedback which helped improve their pedagogy. One teacher spoke about being able to infuse more real world examples into her tasks to better engage students and another spoke about working on chunking complex texts without simplifying the texts to allow students a greater level of access to the content, after receiving feedback.

- All students' programs are infused with a college and career readiness curriculum which is implemented during the ELA class. Embedded in the program are college trips, visits from college staff, topics such as career exploration, money matters, getting into college, and in the upper grades, summer matters. Upper classmen also have the opportunity to take college courses in one of the many City Universities the school is partnered with. Moreover, a greater number of students are enrolled in College Now courses with over 79% of them receiving a grade of C or above.

- The school communicates in several ways with families including phone calls, emails, letters, the Pupil Path/Skedula online grading system and has instituted a way in which parents partner with the school to ensure students are meeting the expectations and are making progress. The Student Needing Academic Plans (SNAP) team is composed of staff who regularly analyze student data, keep in touch with students and families to offer support. The SNAP team brings all parties together when necessary to develop plans and contracts to help improve student behavior, attendance and academic achievement. January Regents exam scores show that 97.2% of students passed the ELA Regents exam with 81.9% of them passing college and career ready at 75 or higher.

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers is engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations and distributive leadership structures. Teachers systematically analyze key elements of teacher and student work.

Impact

The teacher collaborations have strengthened teacher instructional capacity, promoted Common Core aligned work, have resulted in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for students as well as allowed teachers to play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers' work promotes the implementation of the standards. Teachers meet weekly during lesson/unit study to discuss student work using the lesson that preceded the task given to students. On Tuesdays teachers participate in curriculum refinement sessions to review and revise curricula based on their analysis of student work and teacher plans from the day before. During instructional rounds, they observe one another as well as offer and/or receive feedback that helps to move teacher practice. Some of the suggested next steps teachers have given to one another have been: "integrate the use of role-play, reenactment, and visuals when presenting new information, institute a system by which students monitor and track participation during discussions, design activities that ask students to examine a situation from multiple perspectives and use and post questions to move students from surface to deep level thinking".

- Teachers have the opportunity to participate and lead in many teacher collaborations. They serve as a member of more than one team. For example, teachers coordinate the SNAP teams, iLearn, data analyses, Skedula, ELL programs, college support, testing, the Arts programs, technology, and student trips. They rotate their roles as professional developers throughout the school year. The SNAP team protocol is a rigid one in which coordinators follow students who have been brought to their attention because of academic or behavioral issues. They provide additional support to the classroom teachers and call in families when needed to help in the intervention. One student who had issues with his attendance and academic progress and was missing assignments, within a month made significant progress academically and behaviorally.   Steps taken included the guidance counselor participated in the SNAP team's recommendations, the iLearn team worked with the student to help him become eligible for early graduation, a daily individualized conduct sheet was submitted weekly to guidance, and his parents agreed to support the team's work and also help get him to school on time. The intervention anecdote written for him after one month and shared with all staff read "conference with .. to review conduct sheet for History/science. He continues to maintain progress. He is attending class on time, turning in work in a timely fashion, and is noted for excellent behavior and participation. Parent contacted to discuss current progress".

- Teachers help to make decisions that affect student learning. When student math progress was stagnant, teachers suggested that the school leader reprogram students and offer a different sequence for math. Trusting her staff, she changed the sequence from algebra, geometry and trigonometry to geometry, algebra and trigonometry. January's geometry Regents scores showed a 51 percentage point increase in students who passed the Regents exam, from barely 5% passing to over 56% passing.