



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning**

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**It Takes a Village Academy**

**High School K563**

**5800 Tilden Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: Marina Vinitskaya**

**Date of review: February 25, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: David Raubvogel**

## The School Context

It Takes a Village Academy is a high school with 568 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 90% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89.9%.

## School Quality Criteria

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

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students. Leadership and staff successfully partner with families to support student progress towards high expectations connected to college and career readiness.

### Impact

The school has created true partnerships with parents and students that has resulted in strong trusting relationships and increased student ownership of their educational experience.

### Supporting Evidence

- Parent workshops are driven by parent needs and designed to partner with parents as they support their children as students and new arrivals to the country. Workshops include topics such as understanding the Common Core Learning Standards, immigration and the legal system, how to communicate with teachers and the school's support staff through Skedula, and the college application process. Parents spoke to how the school has been instrumental in creating a community of parents who help each other and see the school as a strong ally for their entire family. The school's parent coordinator works collaboratively with the parent association to ensure that all parent communications and workshops are provided in multiple languages to serve the school's large multinational community of newly arrived immigrants.
- The school's guidance team plays an integral role in helping to ensure that all staff members are aware of all students' issues and concerns and can regularly communicate and support students on a daily basis. Specifically, the team informs the entire adult community of all student interactions with the team, communications with parents, student attendance and lateness concerns, updates on where students stand with regards to the college application process, outcomes of parent meetings and requests by parents or suggestions by the team for one to one or group interventions for individual students.
- During a student meeting, students spoke to how teachers and guidance staff challenge them to take advantage of opportunities such as advanced placement classes, as well as additional classes needed to obtain the highest possible diploma option. Students, parents and teachers spoke to how the school's advisory program, known as Family Group, which consists of every adult adopting fifteen students for their entire school career, has been instrumental in helping students succeed in school, while also helping students and their family members become adjusted to life in a new country and to view the school as a safe place for their entire family to find support. Students spoke to how they regularly set goals and discuss them within their Family Group and how this process has helped them to become more responsible and to take ownership of their own learning. This was corroborated by the increase in the number of students taking college level courses and the number of students taking the SAT Exam.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Teachers' pedagogy provides consistent instructional supports, including questioning and discussion techniques. However, the use of strategic entry points and extensions that foster deep reasoning in student work products varies across the school.

### Impact

Across classrooms students are motivated and actively engaged in classroom activities and discussions and curricula extensions support students to produce meaningful work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- In the classrooms observed there was a focus on the instructional shifts such as academic vocabulary and citing text evidence. Students used academic vocabulary and evidenced-based accountable talk while working within their groups. In all English and social studies classes visited, students cited specific evidence from the texts they were reading when answering questions or defending their arguments.
- Across the majority of classrooms, students were given the opportunity to work in peer groups and engage in peer-to-peer discussions. In these peer-groups, high levels of participation were noted.
- In all classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions by responding to teacher-generated questions. It is the principal's expectation for all staff members to create higher level thinking and questioning into their lessons. Teachers are required to scaffold questions in their lesson plans to include group productive struggles and fluency practice. In reviewing lesson plans it was noted that teachers used a variety of strategies to develop questions that generate student discussions. For example, in one guided reading lesson plan reviewed, there was a set of text-dependent and guiding questions to facilitate comprehension. However, in three out of seven classes visited questions were mainly Level 1 and 2 and did not offer all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, the opportunity to demonstrate high-order thinking skills. In a 10<sup>th</sup> grade Global History class students were asked questions such as, "What is the main idea of the event," and "Which side is communist?" In a Living Environment class, students were only asked to identify a role of the placenta.
- Purposeful grouping of students was seen in the vast majority of classrooms. In an English class, students were grouped based on their ability to offer targeted feedback using a rubric. Teachers used a variety of strategies to ensure all students could access the material. In a 10<sup>th</sup> grade Global History class and a 9<sup>th</sup> grade Living Environment class, certain students were provided with leveled readings so that they could more easily access the text.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and tasks in a coherent way. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work ensuring that all students, including lowest and highest achieving learners, have access and are cognitively engaged.

### Impact

All students, including ELLs, students with disabilities and highest achieving learners, are consistently exposed to higher level tasks across classrooms and provided with the necessary supports to access those tasks, leading to college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plans across all content areas revealed that in-class tasks consistently emphasize higher order thinking skills such as citing evidence, developing logical arguments, analyzing information from multiple sources, and applying concepts in real world situations.
- All departments have clearly defined criteria for what students need to know and what skills they need to master to move to the next grade, ensuring coherency across grades and subject areas. During a teacher team meeting observed, teachers used their knowledge of students' preferred learning styles as well as samples of recent student work to modify a literacy unit by purposefully grouping students and ensuring leveled texts would be available.
- The principal provided examples of units in math and social studies that also showed modifications based on student work and teacher team discussions. A review of a geometry unit focusing on angle relationships, parallel lines and volume revealed adjustments to re-teach solving equations.
- Unit plans across all content areas provide numerous scaffolds and entry points such as limiting the amount of problems required for certain students to solve yet keeping the level of rigor the same, purposeful grouping, leveled texts, graphic organizers, and text already partially annotated.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

Across the school teachers use common assessments to track student progress and make adjustments to curricula.

### **Impact**

The monitoring of student progress at the teacher team and classroom level as well as the regular use of checks for understanding have resulted in teachers making effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and increased mastery for all students who are aware of their next learning steps.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- New York City Performance-Based Assessments were administered in all classrooms and the resulting data was used to help determine focus areas for departments. English and social studies teachers are focusing on improving students' ability to cite relevant evidence and write argumentative essays. Science teachers are focusing on developing students' ability to analyze tables, charts and graphs and use this information to draw conclusions and develop logical arguments.
- Teachers use common end-of-unit assessments in all content areas that are aligned to school-wide areas of focus, and then use the data to track student performance. Teachers provide targeted support such as one on one tutoring before and after school. Targeted supports for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have resulted in increased mastery across all content areas. One example is the school's focus on supporting ELLs and students with disabilities. ELLs that began in September have increased their Achieve 3000 results by 185 Lexile points, putting them on track to be proficient at the end of the year. January Regent results showed that more students are retaking Regents in all content areas and scoring above 75. This is especially true for the ELA exam where over 60% of the students that have taken the exam have scored over 75, a 7.5% increase over last June. In addition, 71.5% of students with disabilities are on track to receive Regents diplomas in June.
- In classrooms observed, teachers used exit slips, white boards, and rubrics specific to the task, one on one conferencing with students, and peer and self-assessment to check for understanding. In one 10th grade English class, an exit slip asked "Is it important to look at a character's actions toward other characters? Why or why not?" A 9th grade English class and a 9th grade science class both used the 3-2-1 format where students are required to list three things they learned today, two things they want to know more about, one thing they found interesting for their exit slips.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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**Findings**

All teachers are consistently engaged in examining teacher practice and student data within inquiry-based structured professional collaborations. Distributed teacher leadership is embedded across all areas of the school.

**Impact**

School-wide instructional coherence is seen throughout all classrooms and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect teaching and learning across the school, resulting in increased student achievement.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Instructional strategies associated with the school-wide belief that teachers must meet students where they are and that student collaboration is essential to increasing student achievement were discussed at department team meetings and observed in all classrooms. For example, in all English and social studies classrooms students were citing evidence to defend their arguments during whole class and small group discussions. In a teacher team meeting, teachers were analyzing student work in small groups, using a protocol that identified strengths and weaknesses, next steps for the teacher, and suggested teaching strategies.
- All teachers meet twice a week during grade and department team meetings to analyze student data, review student work products, and share student academic as well as social emotional progress. In addition to these regularly scheduled meetings, the vast majority of teachers communicate through emails to discuss best practices and individual supports for specific students who may need additional support.
- Department and grade team leaders meet once a week with the administration to review teacher and student scholarship data as well as discuss all other aspects of the school. Professional development, school learning walks, articulation events, parent-teacher workshops and all other school-wide events are collaboratively planned and facilitated. During a teacher team meeting observed, teachers spoke about how they have a strong voice in school-wide instructional decisions and their leadership is valued. For example, teachers collaboratively worked with the administration to identify and develop rubrics for a variety of purposes as well as a school-wide grading policy. Teacher leaders regularly identify best practices across classrooms and collaboratively work with the administration to dedicate time during professional development to share these practices.