



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Gotham Professional Arts Academy**

**High School K594**

**265 Ralph Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11233**

**Principal: Alexander White**

**Date of review: May 13, 2015  
Reviewer: Shenean N. Lindsay**

## The School Context

Gotham Professional Arts Academy is a high school with 223 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 83% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 81.0%.

## 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>Celebration</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>Additional Findings</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

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way. Curricula tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

All students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, have access to rigorous curricula and academic tasks that promote higher order thinking as well as college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher lesson plans reviewed provide evidence of higher order thinking across grades and subjects. For example, a Caribbean History lesson plan expected students to select envelopes with an argument, read the evidence that could go into an opposing argument, and use an opposing argument checklist given by the teacher to write their own opposing argument. In an English lesson plan, students are expected to vet thesis statements written by peers.
- The vast majority of curricula reviewed evidenced a coherent expectation that students meet Common Core expectations such as writing arguments focused on discipline specific content, and produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. This rigorous work ensures that students are prepared to take Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBAT's) in lieu of Regents exams. One student stated, "I visit colleges and the work looks like mine or less than what I do now."
- Across the school, teacher lesson plans demonstrate evidence of planning for multiple entry points to meet the needs of all learners and providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking. For example, a lesson plan for a grade 9 Foundations class noted dedicated time for questioning and discussion and student-to-student discussion. This lesson plan indicated that some students would complete a different task that involved the identification of unfamiliar words, followed by purposeful reading in a group to identify three things that stood out along with connections and questions about the book. Teacher lesson plans in a math class noted opportunities for all students to engage in rigorous tasks with the support of peers on all levels through working in a group as they explored problems at different challenge levels. In this lesson plan, the teacher planned for each group to have a student partner so that students could discern an exponential model from a linear model.

# Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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## Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

## Impact

Students are engaged in rigorous thinking and application of content. However, in some classrooms, students do not take full ownership of discussion due to reliance on the teacher for next steps.

## Supporting Evidence

- In a grade 9 English class, students were given various texts to read in pairs or groups, and were told to discuss the questions regarding the story and the author’s intent, and jot responses on post-it notes. In this class, the teacher provided students with a protocol for developing and asking student-generated questions. Afterwards, students from each group shared responses to questions they answered.
- Across classrooms, scaffolds are in place to support the needs of all learners. For example, in a grade 9 Algebra class, the teacher used a trailer of the movie *Pay it Forward*, asking students to jot down three ideas they thought of to help others, and to draw a model that might represent the consequences of the actions being passed on to others who take the same action. The teacher asked the class, “How many people will you have impacted?” Students were encouraged to turn and talk to their peers in response to the question. Once the students shared with a partner, the teacher told the class, “Today you are going to use your mathematical model to make a social argument.”
- Across classrooms, student work products reflect high levels of student thinking. For example, students in a Composition class were given a task of choosing a quote from a text or a poem that stands out to them and supports their thesis. Students were then tasked with crafting a paragraph introducing and leading into the quote, while citing it and analyzing it in depth. In a Calculus class, students engaged in a peer assist activity in which students supported others who were in need of assistance solving problems. After the task was completed, students debriefed with their teacher about the process, and worked independently to solve problems based on rates of change.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student process towards goals, and makes effective adjustments to meet all students learning needs.

### Impact

As a result of actionable and meaningful feedback, students are offered a clear portrait of mastery, and teachers are able to adjust curricular and instructional decisions so all students demonstrate progress towards goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Ongoing checks for understanding were built into the discussions that took place across the vast majority of classes. For example, in a Caribbean Studies class, the teacher conferenced with students and asked questions such as, "Do you know how you're going to respond?" as they worked in groups. In a grade 12 Calculus class, the teacher assessed students through asking questions and giving them opportunities to question peers. As students shared responses, the teacher took notes in her notebook. During the teacher meeting, the teacher shared her findings from the lesson, which indicated that most students mastered the learning objective.
- School-wide, teachers and student use rubrics to assess learning. One student stated, "Rubrics are used to share what is expected, what they're looking for." Another student shared, "When they give us an essay, sometimes I look at other students' papers with the rubric." As a result, there are clear expectations for student mastery, as well as effective adjustments of curricula to meet the learning needs of all students. For example, one member of the teacher team stated, "Assessment has changed the way we conduct student inquiry. Whole classes are created based on skills that need to be taught."
- The school uses the Jupiter online grading system, which is accessed by staff, students, and parents. As a result, students and parents have access to the minute updates regarding student achievement. During student interviews, a student stated, "We see our scores on Jupiter grades. If our grade drops, we see what we missed. If you get a low grade, the teacher gives you a chance to improve." One parent stated, "Jupiter is online. It tells if homework is missing. I can see my child's grades and how many days' assignments are missing. Plus, I can communicate with the school staff if I have questions".

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. The staff provides effective feedback and supports to ensure students are prepared for the next level.

### Impact

The professional community exists within a culture of mutual accountability and ownership of high expectations. Students own their educational experience connected to college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school leader shares expectations through distribution of a staff handbook at the beginning of the school year. The principal and assistant principal meet with staff regularly to discuss expectations during staff and/or individual meetings. Through the establishment of a culture of mutual accountability for student success, all teachers are also expected to support students through advisory and the community circle. When a teacher is not fulfilling an expectation, the school leader provides the teacher with a request form outlining the steps to be taken and the timeframe. These steps are also memorialized in an accountability log in which the school leader tracks requests.
- The principal hosts a mini-retreat with at the beginning of the school year and shares a norming protocol for all meetings with students and staff, expectations for instruction, and strategies for respectful conversation with peers. The staff engages in team building activities to build and strengthen professional relationships.
- School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness to students. For example, the school has partnered with College Access: Research and Action to support the schools advisory curriculum. As a result of students' participation, there has been an increase of college enrollment. Guidance Counselors and school staff meet with students weekly to discuss college and career goals. One student stated, "Every Tuesday, there are college workshops for us to attend. We also have to complete projects based on the career or field we are interested in." Additionally, alumna from the school and current college students coach seniors as they transition from high school to college. As a result, students are prepared for the next level.
- Students complete Performance Based Assessment Tasks, which are equivalent to college coursework as a result of a partnership with the New York Performance Standards Consortium. The school leader and staff share expectations for students through distribution of a Long-Term Learning Target Rubric in each core subject. Students use the rubric to set goals for the semester. One student stated, "I am responsible for setting my goals for the Performance Based Assessment." A grade 12 student shared, "During freshman year, everything seemed pointless. Now, I understand why deadlines and citing evidence is so important." Another student stated, "The Performance Based Assessment Tasks are harder than the Regents exam."

<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**

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work. Distributed leadership structures are embedded.

### **Impact**

Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. Teacher collaboration yields shared improvements in teacher practice.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Members of the teacher team meet once a week to examine student work collaboratively. Additionally, all teachers participate in moderation studies at the school and at Consortium meetings to norm their use of Performance Based Assessment Task (PBAT) rubrics. For example, one teacher stated, “The team has been doing a lot of inter-visitations. It is inquiry based. We also spend a lot of time looking at student work. As a result, teachers can share best practice.” Another teacher shared, “We use an inquiry process of looking at student work. It helps students get higher scores on the Performance Based Assessment Task”.
- Teachers have an opportunity to provide feedback to school leaders that results in change. For example, one teacher stated, “We told the principal we wanted model and master teachers, and the principal approved it because he knew it would help us become better teachers.” Another teacher stated, “The principal is hands off. He allows us to initiate different programs without us coming to him all the time.” Master and model teachers develop protocols for teacher inter-visitation and peer-to-peer feedback that supports teacher development.
- During an inquiry meeting, members of the teacher team reviewed the Performance Based Assessment of three students. The team followed a protocol for looking at student work and a Performance Assessment rubric that was aligned to the task. The team collectively shared strategies to support students’ writing during instruction. One teacher stated, “We realize that we have to revise scaffolds so we created a checklist for analysis of student work. The checklist also helps students understand what it means to build an argument.” Teachers shared that students have shown improvement on tasks related to the Performance Based Assessment.