



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Peace Academy

13K596

**300 Willoughby Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11205**

Principal: Amy Rodriguez

**Date of review: December 5, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit**

The School Context

Peace Academy is a middle school with 48 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 76% Black, 18% Hispanic, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87%.

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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Proficient
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:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the staff, students and families as well as provide support and feedback to meet those expectations.

Impact

Consistent communication of high expectations by school leaders coupled with the support and feedback needed to meet these expectations allow teachers and students to meet these expectations, and families to understand them and students' progress towards these expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Every morning, the principal meets with the staff to get the pulse of the staff and students and to identify/shout out students and teachers who are exhibiting behaviors that are exemplary. There are recognitions for student of the week and student of the month and teacher of the month. In addition, the principal personally writes notes to students who have shown growth or initiative in their work. Part of the blue card (principal's note) reads: "ability + effort = achievement. We see your hard work and are proud of your efforts. Thank you for being a Peace Academy Scholar!"
- All teachers have a Teacher Improvement Plan (TIP) at the school. It is not necessarily because their overall rating requires it but because the principal wanted to help teachers set professional goals and identify specific supports to ensure they meet those goals. Moreover, teachers are expected to participate in at least 2 intervisitations per month. One in their content area, the other in another. They are encouraged and supported by the administration to make that happen and are held accountable for this work by sharing their notes from these observations with the administration and colleagues.
- In addition to completing a college or career project every year all students participate a few times a week in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math class) where they are engaged in real world application of subject matter topics. The class is co-taught by a math and a science teacher. Students during the student interview spoke about how much fun, exciting and engaging their last project was, which was to build a bridge.. Some of the students who show aptitude for math receive integrated algebra classes and take the Integrated Regents exam. Last spring, 100% of the students who took it passed.
- Parents spoke about the school as a second home. They spoke about the open communication that exists between their home and the school. They explained how sometimes they have been able to sit in their children's classrooms and shadow their child. They shared their experiences with Skedula, an online program which allows them to track their children's progress, and their gratitude for the afterschool programs and extra help that teachers provide their children.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

School leaders and faculty are aligning curricula with the Common Core Learning Standards, content standards and the instructional shifts. The school is working to embed rigorous habits and high-order thinking into curricula and tasks across grades and subjects.

Impact

Because the faculty is in its initial stage of deconstructing the standards in order to best present and teach them to students, rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills are inconsistently emphasized across grades and subject areas and for subgroups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Through a School Improvement Grant (SIG), the school is working this year with Cambridge Education (CE) and the National Urban Alliance (NUA) to more closely align curricula to the Common Core. CE is helping the teachers through regular professional development incorporate success criteria such as “We are learning to” and “What I’m looking for” in their lessons. NUA is working with the faculty on the use of graphic organizers to strategically assist students in making their thinking transparent.
- Although there is evidence of planning for differentiation, for example, at the beginning of the school year, one of the assistant principals gathered notes and instructional next steps for each student in the school from the teachers, these specific instructional next steps were not evident in the lesson plans provided.
- During the leadership meeting, the principal explained how she is supporting teachers with planning via the TIPs, feedback after formal and informal observations and the use of protocols: sharing with them tools and protocols to push them to identify next steps, and strategies specifically for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SwD). She explained that part of her job is to help teachers move away from the deficit model of students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students best learn. Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

As a result of the inconsistency in differentiation and the stage at which teachers are aligning their practice to the school's set of beliefs, students are unevenly engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, students were seated in groups but were not able to say whether or not they were working collaboratively or individually. One student told me that they always sit together but she is guessing that today is mandatory group work. There were no clearly defined roles in the groups as expressed in the Leadership Meeting as an expected observed instructional strategy.
- Teachers in three of the five classrooms visited consistently asked questions that were not appropriately challenging students: in one classroom, one of the teachers asked pointing to a rubric (the answer): "How do you check your work is correct?" In another classroom, the teacher asked "when you're recording this, what do you have to add"? When the student asked for clarification, she pointed to the balance he was using (grams) to guide him. In another classroom, the teacher asked questions she was answering herself without giving sufficient student wait time.
- In most of the classrooms, although students were working in groups, they were engaged in the same type of work without differentiation of the process or the product. Most of the classes have students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), yet neither the instruction, nor the materials reflected the diversity of abilities in the classroom.

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create rubrics and assessment inconsistently. Teachers' practices also reflect inconsistent use of on-going checks for understanding limiting the feedback to students and adjustments to instruction

Impact

Teachers use assessments in the classroom but there is a lack of evidence for them consistently making effective adjustments, and providing actionable feedback to students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use common assessments such as Achieve 3000 and Adaptive Minds for the entire student population to identify students' needs and strengths yet teachers provide limited feedback to students regarding their learning needs.
- All students receive intensive literacy and math classes three times a week. Teachers are now looking at the impact of these classes to identify next steps and progress towards goals (80 or above in each subject class).
- During the student meeting, one student summarized the sentiments shared by most regarding the level of feedback received from teachers: "My teacher checks my work sometimes". Although most spoke about peer assessments and the use of rubrics in their classrooms, none were able to articulate goals they were working towards in their subject areas.
- During the class visits, teachers were working with groups of students or teaching the mini lesson. Although there were two teachers in most of the classes visited, some students did not get to interact with a teacher. During a class observation, one student explained his work but could not explain how to check for accuracy or understanding since he was working individually.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place at Peace Academy.

Impact

As a result of teachers regularly meeting, collaborating and supporting one another, they are strengthening their instructional capacity and ensuring their voices are heard in decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- During the content team meeting observed, teachers looked at student work vis-à-vis a rubric for reading standard 6.2 (central idea). They discussed their observations of the trends in student work and shared possible next steps with one another. One of the next steps shared in the group was to keep chunking the texts because when they are long, students tend to get things confused. Another shared next step was to show students different key details for one central idea and work with them to identify which ones support the central idea the best.
- The teachers in the team meeting were using their observations to inform the upcoming unit which will focus on identifying the central idea of a text. Their next steps will be to use the information from the meeting to adjust the upcoming unit (focus on what the students know and are able to do and supplement the unit with supports to help them learn skill gaps).
- Teachers also meet in grade teams and in other forms of professional development. They meet regularly in small groups and one-on-one when necessary with their SIG consultants (Cambridge Education and the National Urban Alliance). They participate in intervisitations and outside professional development as well.
- Teacher teams are led by teacher leaders. Four of the ten teachers at Peace Academy are teacher leaders who facilitate the work of the teams. These teacher leaders shared that the administration is very receptive to different ideas the faculty brings to it. Teachers are encouraged to share best practices and make recommendations for school improvement. Teachers lead many of the initiatives in the school. The following are examples of teacher-led initiatives: enhancing the work of teacher teams, enhancing family and community engagement, and building a school culture that supports effective learning.