



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences

High School K629

**5800 Tilden Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Diane Varano

**Date of review: May 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio**

The School Context

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences is a high school with 353 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 89% Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 82.3%.

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	Proficient
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	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
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Findings

Structures and systems are in place to communicate high expectations to staff. School staff communicates the school's expectations on college and career readiness through ongoing feedback to students.

Impact

Systems of accountability, ongoing feedback and support result in student awareness of the school's expectations for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations through weekly team meetings, professional development, emails and memoranda. Through weekly teacher leader team meetings, grade-level representatives receive information on the school's progress toward meeting Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) goals and the instructional focus on literacy. During a recent meeting, school leaders emphasized that Core Six, a school study on entry points, should be fully implemented to increase student access. A review of a professional learning agenda provides workshop objectives which include articulation of the Danielson Framework for Teaching Domain 2 related to "sound teaching in the classroom."
- Feedback from formal and informal observations is provided directly to teachers through pre- and post- visit sessions with the administration. Feedback is provided both verbally and in writing to assist teachers with understanding and tying their instructional practices to the school's expectations. In one observation feedback form, suggestions included allowing students to answer each other's questions during a lesson and to rephrase questions to allow for this such as, "Who can explain to us....?" or "Can anyone demonstrate at the board for us?" Another form provided similar feedback, such as using questions to engage students more, "Who can tell us...?" and having students answer each other's questions.
- School leaders and staff have reached out to several outside partnerships, such as College Now of Brooklyn College, Advocates and Mentors (CAM) program, and Kingsborough Community college to provide students with the ability to attain college credits. According to students, the curriculum prepares them for future high school classes and college classes. One student stated that they are learning how to write good essays in 9th and 10th grade so they can be prepared for doing research projects in 11th and 12th grade. Another student quoted, "We need to learn how to write in this way because in college, we will be writing lots of essays."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points and high levels of student thinking are uneven.

Impact

Across classrooms, teacher practices present missed opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking in discussion and work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In some classes, the level of rigor was prevalent in teacher questions and student responses. For example, in a grade 9 US History class, the teacher presented students with a continuum of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) 3 questions on the government's role on social security such as, "How does it benefit the whole society?, Were they successful? Would you say Roosevelt was laissez faire?" Student responses to questions such as these consisted of, "The government is interfering in the lives of people and their money which is unfair. They don't trust the people."; "Through government programs and by getting work, people can reinvest in the stock market and eventually be on their feet again." However, this level of questioning and discussion between students and teachers was not evident in all or most of the classrooms visited.
- Work products from classroom lessons observed demonstrated uneven cognitive levels across subject areas and grades. In reviewing student folders for English language arts essays in grades 9 through 12, they demonstrated a focus on claim, supporting evidence and counterclaims. However, in a grade 9 Living Environment class, all of the students were given modified texts on wolves and a graphic organizer to use to find facts in the articles. Student responses on the graphic organizer consisted of facts such as "Top predators are at the top of the food chain" and predators help slow down the spread of disease." When grouped to determine the most important idea, student responses were limited to one word answers.
- Student group discussion was evident in some classes. In a trigonometry class, students were paired and grouped to answer several worksheet questions. However, the level of discussion was limited to one word responses to each other. In a chemistry class, the teacher used a video to explain the factors that affect reaction rates. One student was able to explain to the class a concept presented in the video. However, when asked to work in group on a teacher presented question, "Which solution will have the higher rate?", some groups did not engage in classroom discussion and were not engaged in the task as a group.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school's curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts and emphasize rigorous tasks across grades and subject areas.

Impact

The alignment of curricula ensures rigor in tasks, build coherence, and promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses teacher-created units aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards to integrate the instructional shifts. In a historical writing unit, alignment included references to Standards 3, 6, and 8 for English language arts (ELA) on analyzing how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text, author's point of view and purpose and evaluating the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- The school has adapted approaches, such as Core Six and the "4 to 1" strategy to ensure students are using cite evidence to support claims in writing aligned to instruction shift four. In one ELA lesson plan, students were asked to use the 4 to 1 strategy to read the New York Times article, *Walter Scott is Not on Trial*, and write four key ideas and as a group discuss, determine and agree on the one most important idea.
- In a grade 11 debate unit, students were asked to produce argumentative writing in preparation for a debate on making the school day longer. As part of the task, students will chose a pro or con side to the topic and debate using reasons from texts as well as their own experiences to support their claims. Essential questions for students to use include DOK 3 and 4 questions and prompts: "How can we effectively support our opinions and claims on a particular topic in order to formally debate?"; "How do I properly conduct research while steering clear of obvious bias?"; "How did the final clip inspire you for your own debate?"

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across grades and subject areas, assessment practices are aligned to the curricula, yet limited in being used to provide feedback to students and reflect inconsistent checks for understanding and self reflection.

Impact

Actionable feedback and the use of effective adjustments to meet student learning needs are uneven across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Student work folders and bulletin boards reflect uneven feedback and next steps across grades and subject areas to support students. On ELA essays, teacher feedback consisted of prompts such as “how does this relate to the quote” and “develop this paragraph further.” Some additional evidence provided by the school revealed feedback in math for some 9th grade students. However, in reviewing the majority of student work products on bulletin boards and folders, teacher feedback in areas such as math and science reflect responses such as, “Good work” and “Excellent” with no clear steps to improve their understanding.
- Across classrooms, teachers were observed asking questions to check for student understanding of concepts. In one math class, the teacher provided an example to a pair of students after checking their understanding of independent and dependent events. In a grade 12 English class, the teacher asked students to write facts from an article to prepare a defense for a debate and provided the class with definitions of the word ‘prosecutor’. Additionally, the teacher walked around to ask questions to a group of students and explained the task. However, in a chemistry class, when asked to discuss a science concept in groups, several students were not engaged. The teacher did not walk around to check student understanding and only a few students raised their hand to answer the question on the science concept posed by the teacher.
- Student self-assessment opportunities are inconsistent after a review of work products and classroom visits. In math and US History class visits, entry and exit slips were being implemented. A review of student work products reflect self assessments tools were provided in some areas, such as student mock evaluation forms for ELA and certain math problem solving tasks.

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

Teacher teams meet consistently to analyze assessments and work for targeted, at risk students. Distributed leadership structures are in place to allow teachers to have a voice on decisions.

Impact

Teacher team work and leadership capacity lead to adjustments to curricula and student progress toward goals for groups of students across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams are a combination of grade and vertical content teams. Grade teams meet regularly to discuss the analysis of student work and data. At risk students are chosen based on baseline assessment data in writing as part of the school’s instructional focus in literacy and goals to work on specific literacy skills are set in each team. For example, based on a review of student data, grade 9 teachers reported that they needed to focus on developing critical thinking using informational texts and supporting ideas by citing evidence from texts. The grade 10 team reviewed data at the beginning of the year and decided to focus on highlighting and annotation to improve student understanding of informational grade-level texts. In addition, the grade 11-12 team used baseline data to focus on argumentative writing through the debate process as well as build on research skills with the goal of achieving 15% improvement per cycle.
- Teacher teams set goals to adjust curriculum throughout the year towards student progress for specific skills, such as the development of central ideas and analyzing claims and evidence. A review of grade 9 data reflects a 77% gain in the development of central ideas. In analyzing claims and evidence, a 54% gain was made in grade 9. In the grade 11-12 team which focused on argumentative writing with an emphasis on elaboration demonstrated a gain of 32% in this skill area. However, there was only a slight increase in citing evidence of 1% which is now their skill focus. To support students in this area, the grade 11-12 team has decided to make adjustments in their instruction to emphasize annotation to support struggling students in this area. A review of unit plans reflected prompts to support this change in the curricula.
- Each team has a teacher leader who facilitates meetings and acts as a representative of the grade during Teacher Leader meetings which occur weekly. Decisions on professional learning opportunities, team protocols, school policy and goal setting are discussed during these meetings. Teacher leaders reported that they share the school’s focus during team meetings and the administration allows them to make curricular decisions as needed to support student learning needs. For example, teacher leaders reported that the administration has supported their decisions to adjust their curriculum to add more strategies for writing revisions and annotation as a result of baseline reviews.