



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**The Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and
Exploration**

Elementary School 636

**280 Hart Street
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Takeema Allen

**Date of review: December 11, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago**

The School Context

Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration is an elementary school with 188 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 58% Black, 37% Hispanic, 3% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.0%.

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	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Developing
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	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Teachers meet in professional collaborations and analyze assessment outcomes during team meetings. The principal provides opportunities that promote teacher leadership and input on key instructional decisions.

Impact

Inquiry-based teacher teamwork is building teacher capacity leading to increased student progress. Distributive leadership structures support staff collaboration and enhance pedagogical skills that improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly across grade levels with a focus on looking at student work, reflective of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), to identify areas of need, plan lessons, and improve classroom practices. For example, a teacher shared that after analysis of her students' writing samples in English language arts (ELA) the team determined that several students were having difficulty supporting the main idea in their writing. After implementing suggestions offered by members of the team, that included greater use of details and individual conferences with students, the teacher was able to guide her students to achieve the goal. The findings and impact were shared with the team to promote best practices.
- The school leader supports teachers at team meetings by periodically collaborating with teams on planning and providing feedback. In addition, teachers engage in inter-visitations at the school to highlight exemplars of effective instructional practices.
- Teacher leaders regularly meet with the principal to develop and plan professional development opportunities and to discuss growth towards improved pedagogical practices aligned with the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, based on the need to improve student writing and generate higher order thinking among students, the school provided additional workshops, with support from the network, on strategies to increase volume in students' writing products and refine questioning using the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) rubric respectively.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

While the school uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching to align pedagogy and provides instructional supports for students, the emphasis on higher order thinking skills and the use of multiple entry points that would promote in-depth analysis, deep student engagement and rich class discussion, are inconsistent.

Impact

Teachers are beginning to implement curricula and academic supports to yield meaningful student work products, yet there are missed opportunities for all learners, including student subgroups, to engage in high-level discussions and create meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, the school's beliefs on how students learn best include opportunities for higher level questioning and in depth discussions. However, these practices were not implemented consistently across classrooms. For example, in one classroom observed, the lesson consisted mainly of student responses to teacher directed questions that yielded limited discourse. In another classroom, activities included teacher questions such as "What are we doing with this problem? Adding or subtracting?" This was followed by students completing worksheet exercises that did not include peer collaboration and did not reflect mastery of the skills by the students.
- In several classrooms, students were observed working in groups with support from teachers and paraprofessionals. However, in several classrooms lessons did not consistently include demonstrations of expected outcomes and learning that provided appropriate scaffolds and challenge for subgroups. For example, during an ELA lesson observed, the lesson presentation was conducted whole group and focused entirely on comparing and contrasting two different texts using a Venn diagram with little evidence of multiple entry points for all learners.
- While bulletin board displays in the halls contained samples of student writing and learning in content areas, in most classrooms student work products did not reflect high levels of thinking. For example, some math work samples reflected a completed series of math exercises in isolation of application or problem solving contexts.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school has aligned curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS); teachers engage in the use of data analysis to plan tasks for all learners, including student subgroups to promote rigor.

Impact

The school's curriculum planning is promoting coherence to ensure that all students are college and career ready. The use of data to plan academic tasks that emphasize higher order thinking is enhancing cognitive engagement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participating in teams two times weekly ensure articulation and alignment of curricula and CCLS via the development of units of study in English language arts and math. In addition, teachers are in the process of refining units of study to include standards from the New York City Scope and Sequence in science and social studies to support the school's goal of college and career readiness.
- Based on analysis of student work, teachers have identified writing and vocabulary as focus areas and plan lessons to engage all students in rigorous tasks that promote thinking. For example, in a science class, groups of students collaborated to discuss and document information gathered on food chains, energy, and ecosystems, and shared their findings with the class using academic language.
- Teachers plan lessons and units of study in ELA and math using summative and formative assessment outcomes such as item analysis of the State and end-of-unit tests to inform curricula decisions and plan academic tasks that engage all learners. For example, in an ELA class and a math class, visuals and manipulative materials respectively were used to scaffold the learning for groups of students identified in need of additional support.

Findings

The school uses common assessments and classroom checks for understanding to track student progress towards goals and inform curricula and instructional adjustments.

Impact

The school has implemented structures to measure learning progress through data analysis and during instruction; these practices inform adjustments that meet students' academic needs, resulting in student mastery of learning objectives and gains in State assessments in ELA and math.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a range of common assessments that includes results from State tests, Measures of Student Learning (MOSL), running records, and end-of-unit tests in content areas. The analysis of assessment results have led to the development of instructional goals for teaching that include greater use of higher order questioning, increased writing in all subjects, and the targeting of skills with an emphasis in ELA and math. Information from these assessments is used to monitor individual student progress.
- Teachers and teacher teams gather data that includes formative assessments and student work to determine levels of student learning to adjust instruction across classrooms. For example, one teacher shared that when her students demonstrated that they were having difficulty making inferences from text, she adjusted her lessons to focus on this skill by carefully analyzing the message implied in the details.
- Ongoing classroom checks for understanding such as questions, responses, student self-assessments, and reflections, inform instructional adjustments that support all learners including student subgroups. For example, in one classroom when a group of students indicated that they did not understand the lesson concepts, the teacher sat with the students and provided additional support.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Although the school communicates expectations to staff and aligns professional development activities to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, communications, and student performance updates to keep students and families informed of progress and development towards college and career readiness is inconsistent.

Impact

The lack of systems to ensure consistent communication with students and families diminishes opportunities for students' continued growth and for families to support their children towards a clear path of higher achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FfT) to inform classroom instructional practices and communicates instructional expectations to teachers and staff. Professional development workshops are led by teacher leaders and network specialists, and are conducted at outside venues and during individual teacher meetings.
- Teachers publish parent newsletters by grade level that include curricula topics for the grade. However, with the exception of science, there was little evidence that parents received the newsletters, as parents were not familiar with the curricula topics their children were studying in class.
- Progress reports for parents to inform them of their children's performance in school have recently been developed. The principal stated that the first progress report was sent home in December.
- Teachers provide written feedback to students that include strategies and next steps as evidenced by post-it notes on student work products. However, this practice was inconsistent for all subject areas across the school.