



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Vista Academy

Middle School K661

**350 Linwood Street
Brooklyn
NY 11208**

Principal: Dia N. Bryant

**Date of review: April 28, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

The School Context

Vista Academy is a middle school with 232 students from grade six through grade seven. The school population comprises 28% Black, 66% Hispanic, 1% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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	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	Well Developed
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:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations around the Danielson Framework for Teaching to staff, providing training. The staff and leaders effectively communicate expectations connected to a college and career readiness path, and successfully partner with families.

Impact

The administration and staff share a culture of mutual accountability for these high expectations. Parents, administration, and staff work together to support student progress toward high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Students stated that they attended a tour of St. John's University, where parents proudly reported that more than half the school has achieved summer scholarships. When asked what they wished for the school, students stated, "I wish that everyone at Vista is successful and go to a good [college]" and "I wish other schools would strive for success like Vista is making us strive." A document review showed a career day occurred. Parents stated they attended six Saturday sessions at the Parent University. The sessions covered understanding the Common Core, career readiness, and supporting children's success. Students attended concurrent sessions with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and University students tutor after school.
- Parents stated that they are pleased with the level of consistent communication from the school that comes as teacher phone calls, workshops, emails, report cards, and access to Skedula, an online grade book and data warehouse that also sends messages to families, and monthly coffee with the principal. A parent mentioned that not only do teachers communicate but also she once received a call from the dean, who noticed her son walking home and called concerned since mom usually drove him.
- The administration consistently communicates high expectations to staff through a variety of sources including the morning meeting, staff handbook, and weekly newsletters that include the instructional focus, quotes, announcements, professional development focus, articles aligned to the week's focus or observation trends, coaches corner, Collaborative Action Research Project (CARP) report, this week in special education, and the "Elite 8 High Expectations" which are the domains of the Danielson Framework for Learning. The weekly newsletters provide educators with techniques for pedagogical moves such as scholar-led discussions, lesson planning, and data analysis. The domains include trends in the feedback to staff as a whole from the past week's frequent observation cycle. Newsletters frame the week with expectations reiterated at morning meetings.
- Administration holds staff accountable for high expectations through frequent observations that inform the professional development cycle, which is staff created and delivered. A review of teacher observations demonstrate actionable feedback for high expectations that leads to professional growth supported through intervisitations, coaching, and professional development. Teachers stated the culture of learning where they inter-visit frequently.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, pedagogy is becoming aligned to curricula, beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best, and inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Although pedagogy is informed by the Danielson Framework and the instructional shifts, the inconsistent multiple entry points lead to uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- There was an uneven implementation of the school's belief that students learn best through hands-on experiences and with the entry points needed for each student where they are. In a sixth grade English language arts (ELA) class, students were at various stages of drafting during an argument essay writing assignment, with one drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Students peer revised using a peer revision checklist. The teacher moved from group to group supporting students both individually and in groups to move forward from stage to stage of the writing process. Yet, in a seventh grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) class, students spent the entire observation struggling to complete the Do Now about finding the missing angle measure of complementary, supplementary, and vertical angles. There were some groups with misconceptions and others unable to move forward after completing one step of the problem, as teachers moved from group to group and time was extended.
- In most classes visited the questions were at the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels 1 and 2. In a sixth grade math class the teacher demonstrated the area of a box, posing questions, "What are we taking the sum of?" and "Why wouldn't I wrap the inside of the box?" to students about how to wrap it with paper. Students turned to discuss with their peers of how they would not need to wrap the inside of the box to determine the surface area but instead use the height and length. Some students discussed while others remained silent.
- In a seventh grade science class, students worked in groups to complete a lab about solutions. They observed two cups with solutions, completed an inquiry lab with their peers, and then reported the answers to the whole class. Some students used the discussion prompts while others did so only when the teacher prompted, resulting in a teacher-student call and response without students engaging in a discussion with each other. Additionally, some groups struggled with the questions while others were early finishers looking for next steps. In a 12:1:1 special education sixth grade science class students reviewed the definition of a stimulus as the teacher used PowerPoint slides for the mini lesson as students took notes while she posed questions at DOK levels 1 and 2. For example, "What is a stimulus?" and "If they can't change then what will happen?" However, not all students answered a question, leaving some disengaged.
- In a seventh grade ELA class, students presented a summary of their persuasive essays using outlines and a listening checklist, with which the audience provided warm and cool feedback. Yet in a sixth grade social studies class students listened to a lecture, watched a video, but the DOK1 questions resulted in a misconception about dictators that was not clarified. Although the teacher asked if students wanted "to confirm, challenge or extend", using the school's discussion prompts no discussion ensued.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core, and make purposeful decisions to build coherence and refinement using student work and data.

Impact

Curriculum promotes college and career readiness for all students, so that they have access and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal led the staff in their determination to track the use of Codex last year in each of the iterations of the curriculum maps, using student work and data to determine the progress of content and achievement for their students. To this end during the summer, they determined that staff was supplementing Codex more than using it with fidelity. As a result they adopted Pearson Literature this year, to support their move towards a humanities model. They continue to focus on this refinement and tracking curricula for progress of content and achievement for their students, while implementing the instructional shifts that support students' path toward college and career readiness.
- To inform adjustments to units of instruction that meet the students' needs, the staff conducts four six-week data cycle at which time teachers complete action plans for revisions and reteaching based on student data. The principal approves the action plans with feedback. The plans with revised lessons for Re-engagement week. This cycle of curricular revisions and purposeful decisions to revise, adjust, and reteach builds coherence. For example, a review of curriculum shows a lesson plan from unit three in seventh grade English language arts to reteach connotative versus figurative language, a portion of standard L.7.5a "Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings." on which the majority of the class did not achieve mastery.
- A review of curricula demonstrates curriculum maps have undergone a revised focus from a broad map to one that uses the adopted Understanding by Design format with agreed upon components. These components include the unit overview, unit goals, essential questions, formative and summative assessments/performance tasks, modifications, enduring understandings, Common Core Learning Standards, essential skills knowledge and concepts, learning activities, differentiation by product, differentiation by process, differentiation by content, key terms, resources. Units also use "I can" statements that put the Common Core Learning Standards student friendly language. Units contain feedback from the administration, coach and consultants. Teachers stated that the curriculum map format has focused their planning.
- Staff have adopted an agreed upon format for lessons that include the learning objectives, Common Core Standards addressed, desired results, possible student misconceptions/errors, materials, homework assignments with options, assessment during the lesson, differentiation plan and strategies including three groups of students. The lesson components follow a workshop model with timed components including do now/activator, model/teach/guided practice, active involvement/check-in assessment, work time/independent or group practice, closing, exit ticket, and teacher reflection.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that are becoming aligned with the school's curricula and assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Assessments are providing limited feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Although the rubrics observed were Common Core-aligned, the student work accompanying them had a variety of uneven feedback from checkmarks and rubric ratings to questions, feedback and comments. Some teachers use the plus/delta to show areas that are commendable and need growth respectively. For example, "Plus-You wrote, solved, and graphed your inequality correctly. Delta-Your explanation does not explain how you found that it can have 9 people or less." Others use a similar format without the plus/delta, "You have used an excellent combination of paraphrasing and direct quotes to support your answer, but you did not explicitly explain how his perspective is influenced by what happened in Ferguson." Yet, other examples, on student class projects had teacher feedback that merely stated, "Good Job", and others that asked questions or gave commands, "What is the definition of a line?" and "How do you know this a 90 degree angle?" and "Be careful when you label." And some that do not provide clear actionable next steps to improve, "Nice, I will urge you to read more carefully next time—there are some gaps in your essay, but overall you still accomplished what you needed to-good job."
- Across classrooms teachers inconsistently checked for understanding. In a sixth grade English language arts class the teacher moved from group to group checking on student progress during the writing process, tracking students' progress on a clipboard, having students implement their writing checklist and peer revision checklist. Additionally, in a sixth grade math class the teacher posed a question for students to discuss in groups, checked on two groups, and clarified whole class the definition of an acronym being used. Yet, in a seventh grade science class although students worked in groups and the teacher moved to groups checking their progress, she called for attention in the front and realized that she forgot one table. With the class silently watching, she checked in with the final table, found a misconception, and used it to support student learning. But these formative adjustments during the class do not consistently occur across classrooms. Further in an ICT sixth grade math class the teachers moved from group to group helping students individually and as a group, but did not regroup the whole class when the time for the Do Now elapsed and the students did not progress to the desired result. In a sixth grade 12:1:1 science class, the teacher called on the same students, leaving some students silent and disengaged.
- Teachers use or create rubrics that are aligned to the Common Core. The principal stated, "We still need support in clarifying rubrics by making them more specific. As we approach next school year, we will focus on using them more for guiding expectations and modeling exemplary work." So the use of rubrics as a method of guiding expectations and modeling exemplary work is 'work in progress'.

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.

Impact

The structured, inquiry-based collaborations promote the implementation of the Common Core while strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in content teams after school once a week and during a common planning time during the week as well as informally as needed, even daily. Teachers use a protocol, and rotate the roles of documenter, facilitator, agenda creator, and presenter. The presenter poses the question he is asking for their support in answering by looking at the student work. Next the team reviews the students' work with a lens toward answering the presenter's question. After sharing the noticings, they determine implications for classroom practice. Then the presenter responds with highlights and a summation. Teachers agreed that, "This time together to look at student work and data has become a way to improve student outcomes and is a valuable way to learn from a colleague outside of the classroom."
- Teachers agreed that they inter-visit other's classes stating, "Our staff is keen on going into other classes and learning from each other all year." There is a collegiality and respect for each other and from what they can learn. During one co-teaching class visit, a teacher daily covers for the second teacher while she closes her previous class to join this one. Yet, during the course of the 'hand-over', he noticed that students struggled with the Do Now, and he chose to stay and support his colleagues, although he was not required to do so.
- The school conducts a data cycle four times a year and in teacher team meetings, staff analyzes the data to determine a reteach action plan for the components of the sub-standards that students did not master. The principal approves each and provides with comments and feedback in time for staff to conduct a "Re-engagement week" where students are re-taught using different instructional strategies in small groups, those skills and knowledge and then re-assed. Teachers described it as a way "to unpack the data and reteach what students they missed or did not understand."
- Additionally teachers meet in other teams. For example, the cluster selected Vista Academy to be part of CARP, a special project whereby the team determines an action research question. Through discussions, the team narrowed it to "How do we improve the quality of scholar-to-scholar and whole class discussions?" Teachers gather data from interviews, lessons, and class observations looking for teachers' use of the "challenge, confirm, and extend", the school's discussion prompts. Across the four-week research and action plan teachers have observed scholars using the discussion prompts more often and educators engage in planning for discussions. One result of using the discussion prompts has been observed by all teachers, "In the morning meeting scholars have a voice and are more willing to respond to the daily quote with confidence, than they were at the beginning of the research project four months ago."