



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Academy of Talented Scholars

20K682

**50 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Josephine Sportella-Giusto

Date of review: December 11, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Roxan Marks

The School Context

The Academy of Talented Scholars is an elementary school with 356 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 4% Black, 13% Hispanic, 62% White, and 18% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.1%.

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	Well Developed
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	Proficient
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	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school communicates high expectations with the entire community through its comprehensive website and provides ongoing communication with teachers, students and families. Teachers share strategies to support all students including those in the ASD Nest program and teams of teachers continually provide guidance support and advisory for all students.

Impact

Teachers have a deep understanding of the diversity in the students they serve and use Tribes to embed character values that are infused in the culture of the school. The school has created a strong student centered way of life building on social-emotional foundations resulting in a safe and inclusive environment for all students, staff and families.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has 11 classes for students identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the ASD/Nest teacher team works collaboratively to ensure students are supported in social and emotional development and academic rigor is embedded in daily instruction allowing students to meet or exceed the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). This team has a wide range of pedagogues that work together to develop long and short term goals, discuss and implement strategies, collect data, revisit and share during the team meetings.
- The six community agreement of Tribes includes attentive listening, mutual respect, appreciations no put downs, the right to pass, safety with body and heart and personal best. The school engages all teachers, administrators, students and families to collaborate by creating active participation and high expectations for all students.
- The Tribes facilitator supports teachers and provides direct instruction in classrooms integrating cooperative learning strategies into academic content, using reflective techniques and supporting students with project based activities where they are involved in shared decision making, problem solving and conflict resolution. The book of the month initiative is directly linked to the values of Tribes and a monthly letter is sent home for families.
- The school leader communicates high expectations to all stakeholders and aligns their action plans with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the six elements of the Capacity Framework. Teachers engaged in professional learning looking closely at rigorous instruction, supportive environment, strong family-community ties and principal continually consult with staff to evaluate and adjust professional learning opportunities and students are prepared for the next level.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to school beliefs and the Danielson Framework for Teaching provides a common language shared by the school community. Across most classrooms questioning and scaffolds consistently offer support for English language learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

Instructional practices across classrooms afford most students opportunities to think deeply as they engage in higher levels of thinking and participation in producing meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In a third grade social studies class students were working in groups reading about the daily lives of children in Thailand and were asked to compare and contrast text with their own lives in America. Students were provided various texts and were locating key information in order to make accurate comparison. The students held each other accountable and prompted another student to look into the text to support his point of view and another student stated that now we need to underline that fact. Choice was provided to students and groups decided the best way to present their information during class share.
- During an ELA lesson, fifth grade students were developing ideas for their literary essays by finding text evidence that aligns with each subordinate idea. Active engagement offered students time to practice using a graphic organizer, sentence strips with supporting ideas and key evidences. SMARTboard was used to support students and the teacher provided direct instruction to a group providing prompts and reminders. One student struggled in a productive way to clarify his understanding and even called the teacher back to ask some key questions in order to fully understand and make sense of his thinking. Classroom charts were used for strategy prompts and visual supports were in place for all learners.
- Kindergarten students participated in an Ortho-Gillingham lesson exploring the “glued” sounds by learning about words with –onk and -unk. Explicit teaching included review of sounds and phonetic rules, use of small and large sound cards, and magnetic tiles and boards were provided to students. There were high levels of engagement, active participation including movement, tracing letters in the air (skywriting), tapping and use of echo strategy.
- In science, students used hands-on investigations to explore the properties of electricity and magnetism by creating a circuit using a battery as the source and a light bulb as the receiver. An advance organizer was created to demonstrate the flow of electricity and writing was infused in the lesson as students were asked to explain the science of the circuit. Teacher asked a range of questions to assist students in making connections to prior learning and discussion among students was purposeful and productive to the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that all curricula are Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned and the integration of shifts is evident in lessons. Academic tasks promote higher order thinking to ensure all students including English language learners and students with disabilities think at high levels.

Impact

The school's curriculum is coherent allowing for engaging experiences with subjects while promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project curriculum and teachers plan lessons that are rigorous ensuring multiple entry points and appropriate scaffolds are embedded in units. The 4th grade unit of historical fiction identifies priority standards, uses mentor texts to assist students to develop deep understanding and interpretation of complex story elements. Unit development is clearly outlined with explicit teaching points, big ideas and essential questions for exploration.
- The founding principles of this school was based on Renzulli's School Enrichment Model (SEM) and organizes 10 week cycles of instruction based on student interest survey results which affords all students opportunities to self-select areas of interest and explore various career paths. Teachers facilitate enrichment cluster instruction supported by professors, outside agencies and parent experts that provide real world experiences to students. The SEM provides hands-on approach to learning covering a variety of topics including arts, journalism, science, health professions and sports. Interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning is thoughtfully aligned to CCLS and includes topic specific vocabulary and technical language.
- Reach the World (RTW) partnership provides students with interactive use of technology to enrich social studies curricula by connecting classrooms to volunteers traveling and exploring the globe. The goal is to ensure students are prepared to participate, interact in today's global community supporting 21st Century Skills. Through standards based activities including web-based journalism, videoconferencing and collaborative projects students go on virtual journeys that extends their view of the world. This online program supports students' understanding of geography and cultures by providing access to many countries via satellites and program is aligned with NYS social studies standards.
- Teachers created lesson plan templates to guarantee uniformity across grades and school-wide coherence. Teaching points aligned with standards, ongoing assessments, differentiation, key vocabulary and questions are some key components to the planning documents. Lessons have connections to prior learning activities and Universal Design for Learning ensures access for all students leading to college and career readiness.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and teachers continually look and use data from assessments to track progress and determine mastery of content. Use of rubric, conferencing and ongoing checks for understanding allow teachers to make adjustments in curricula and lessons.

Impact

Assessments provide teachers with a portrait of student progress towards goals and inform decision in adjusting curricula and giving meaningful feedback to students. However, in some classrooms peer feedback and self-assessment by students was evident but needs to be consistent across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The school was ranked number one in district 20 for ELA results with 61.5% of students meeting and exceeding state standards and 2nd place for mathematics with 76.7% scoring level 3 and 4. School leaders and teachers use state level item analysis, formative assessments, on demand writing pieces, end of unit test and performance tasks results to adjust their practices, refine goals and monitor progress for groups of students. The hiring of a fulltime academic coach was based on trends discovered through data and to support teachers will alignment of assessments to units of study. Data specialist works with teachers and grade leaders on analysis of school level data.
- Teachers create rubrics and checklists that align with units of study. The school collects multiple sources of data including ATS, ARIS, SESIS, STARS, TC Assessment Pro and school created Google documents. Teachers use and analyze conference notes, anecdotal records, and exit slips to inform planning and instruction. The school is currently using Datacation/Skedula with their school-wide inquiry group to track and monitor progress of these students.
- Teachers use checks for understanding during lessons, listening to students during turn and talk activities and conference notes to create a holistic picture of the students' thinking and mastery. In most classrooms, teachers used other students to restate information, participate in turn and talk protocols to assess understanding of content. However, additional support is needed to expand the use of student self-assessment strategies, students monitoring their own understanding and peer feedback across the school.
- Data is used to monitor and track students in the lowest third. Each student identified has a specific area of focus, service provided and clear action plan which includes, Foundations, guided reading, word study, use of graphic organizers, sentence starters, AIS or some other intervention strategy. These students are discussed and monitored by teams of teachers and administrators.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All teachers participate in inquiry collaborations through the child study team, grade level team and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)/Nest team using data and student work to inform academic and social-emotional decisions for the entire school community.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has enhanced teacher practice, provided supportive strategies for all students to reach high academic standing while differentiating services for those students most in need. Teacher leadership is an essential aspect of the daily work in the school and teachers have a voice in key decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- The ASD/Nest team meets weekly and follows a structure to make the most of the time together. The use of Google docs provides a space to share information to the larger community and students receive a case study once a month. During these meetings teams of teachers look at the whole child, since most students are academically on track, the team works more on social-emotional supports. They involve prior teachers of students to lend insights and as a team decide on a strategy for the child. During the observation of a team meeting, it was decided that the use of a visual prompt for the student to keep on the desk as a reminder to support that student with organization. Parents are provided with the strategies to support their child at home.
- Teachers are involved in the child study team which ensures that students are afforded the supports needed to meet the challenges of the Common Core Learning Standards and differentiated supports are in place for at risk students. The team uses a case conference model infusing Response to Intervention (RtI) and protocols to maximize multiple perspectives and data during these meetings. Using a collaborative approach, the team creates strategies specific to the student and following up is a key aspect of the team's work. The case conference part of the team meeting is dedicated to the discussion of individual students, the progress, area of need and the modification or development of a plan. The second aspect of the meeting is grounded in data inquiry work. Using a protocol, team members look at student work and everyone participates by providing feedback.
- Vertical alignment in planning and curricula is maintained by the grade leader team. This team has shifted the practices and adjusted how it works by constantly reflecting as they keep data and student work at the forefront of their work. Looking for gaps in learning through analysis of work products, using backwards planning to create rigorous task with various points of entry for students, creating rubrics and checklists are some of the activities at the heart of this team. Teachers engage in norming activities to align grading policy, goal setting activities, progress monitoring and meet regularly with school leaders. This ongoing sharing of ideas, strategies, vertical planning and inter-visitations has strengthened their pedagogy and established coherence across classrooms.