



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice**

**High School K685**

**250 Hooper Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11211**

**Principal: Wanda Vazquez**

**April 21, 2015  
Reviewer: Janice Ross**

## The School Context

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is a high school with 225 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 13% Black, 84% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0 % Asian students. The student body includes 16 % English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 84.0 %.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness, and collaborate with families to support student progress toward those expectations. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear, focused, and effective feedback.

### Impact

Systems of reciprocal communication lead to a successful partnership with families. Guidance and advisement supports ensure that students, including high-need subgroups, own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school holds student-led forums four times a year with advisory classes, supporting the school theme of peace and justice. There is a Unity Day, Revolution Day, and Fly Girl Festival that celebrates successful women. Students perform written pieces, conduct lessons, and the entire community is involved, including parents, teachers, and staff. Alumni return to school to participate in a panel discussion about college and career preparation. In addition, alumni host college tours of their current schools. Students expressed that advisory supported them in their relationships with one another and with their teachers. They enjoyed looking at issues that were in line with the school's theme and relevant to today's world. Students' success is celebrated throughout the building. For example, students who made the honor roll have their names on stars on the *Wall of Academic Excellence*. These students also participate in special trips and attend an honor roll gala in June with their families.
- Parent workshops are offered monthly in topics such as understanding the college financial aid process, transition to college, and college admission. In addition, parents of grade 9 and 10 grade students may participate in workshops that focus on the transition to high school, college admissions, and PSAT/SAT support.
- There are numerous modes of communication to parents and students, such as Engrade progress reports, an open door policy, calls home to celebrate student success, and e-mails. Students collectively agreed they like the weekly progress reports and shared that their parents look at them on Fridays to determine how students will spend their weekend.
- The school participates in the Early College Awareness & Readiness Preparation Program (ECAPP), which begins during the freshmen orientation. All students participate in college meetings by grade level throughout the year. Students in grades 11 and 12 participate in a college preparation course twice a week during the school day. There are college trips such as New York City College Day where the entire school body visits colleges in New York City, and College Day where the entire student population visits colleges outside New York City.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies (including questioning, scaffolds in English and/or native language where appropriate, and routines) consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Teachers consistently use effective questioning and discussion techniques.

### Impact

All learners, including English language learners and student with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products. Across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school is a performance based school, and uses a school wide lesson template to encourage the use of higher order thinking questions, student lead activities, and differentiation. During the student meeting, students affirmed that they are better prepared for college because they have to conduct research and master the material in order to present their portfolios.
- In a grade 9 English class, students read and annotated text while seated in a circle configuration. This was a student centered lesson, with access provided for English language learners and students with disabilities. English language learners were provided with dictionaries, and the teacher assisted them by speaking in both Spanish and English. Students then developed questions that they would like to ask the playwright August Wilson. Students with disabilities were given a T-chart to assist them in note-taking. However, in a Chemistry class, students played a Bingo game to learn the Periodic Table and, while the students were engaged in identifying the specific elements, the lesson was teacher centered.
- In a Global History class, students participated in a Socratic Seminar, where they were given Bloom's question stems to create questions for each other around the topic of colonialism, tribalism, ethnicity and nationalism. This lesson was in direct support of the school's instructional focus of fostering community and critical dialogue skills as the teacher encouraged students to support their answers with textual evidence. In a grade 12 social studies class, students were also engaged in a Socratic Seminar, demonstrating alignment of strategies across the social studies classes.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

Curricular coherence across grades and subject areas promotes college and career readiness for all students. Individual and groups of students, including the lowest and highest achieving students and English language learners and students with disabilities, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers begin planning curricula in the spring for the following year. Each August, teachers participate in a retreat during which they revise curricula using Understanding by Design principles. In addition, teachers present their maps to their curriculum committees three times a year and receive feedback on academic tasks, assessments, access, alignment and overall curriculum design. For example, this feedback has supported the development of rigorous cross curricular projects and assessments aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, as well to develop cohesive practices that will ensure vertical and horizontal alignment of the writing and research process.
- The school has aligned curricula to the school's theme. For example, the school has a Social Justice and Latinos curriculum for grade 12. Students are expected to read fiction and non-fiction, cite strong textual evidence, and produce a culminating multi-lingual, multi-media newspaper project to support college and career readiness, and supports the literacy instructional shift as it requires writing to sources.
- Curricula maps indicate differentiation of instruction in support of English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities. For example, the math curriculum map notes a range of differentiation strategies such as the use of visuals, varying question types, graphic organizers and modeling.
- Students are expected to complete high level tasks, such as seminar and research projects, which foster a student centered and rigorous learning environment. For example, the majority of the school's assessments are performance based such as, enlightenment debates, seminars, human rights trials, and "Who Am I?" book presentations.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### **Impact**

Coherence in assessment structures ensure that teachers and students receive actionable and meaningful feedback regarding student achievement. Teachers adjust curricular and instructional decisions so that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery. Effective instructional adjustments meet all students' learning needs, and ensure that students are aware of next learning steps.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- There is an established assessment calendar for each semester, including a progress report outlining students' strengths and weakness and suggestions for improvement. Once a year in each course, students receive a narrative report that includes additional detail, providing students with actionable feedback regarding their progress towards mastery. This feedback includes strengths and weakness in regard to skill attainment and assignment mastery, as well as completion.
- Every three weeks, students are assessed relative to their mastery targets and mid-terms. During the school's Self Directed Improvement System (SDIS) meeting, teachers review this data and analyze whether the students met standards and chart their progress. Teachers then revise curricula, unit and lesson plans to meet the needs of all learners. For example, on the lesson plan submitted there is a differentiation section for process to ensure access for students with disabilities and English language learners.
- Teachers create goals for student subgroups and work collaboratively to revise tasks, projects and assessments aligned to this data. Teachers develop common scaffolds such as graphic organizers, Spanish-English dictionaries and tiered resources across grade levels based on data analysis and identified student need.
- Across classrooms, teachers incorporate checks for understanding. For example, in a science class, students were given an exit slip and were asked to develop a brief argument as to whether or not they support stem cell research. In an English class, students created their own questions, engaged in a Socratic seminar, and participated in peer assessment using a task specific seminar rubric as part of this process. Students were required to complete a seminar evaluation as an exit ticket to ensure their upcoming essay was informed by the results of that day's work.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are embedded as part of the school culture.

### Impact

Teacher collaboration results in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. There is effective teacher leadership, and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has two leadership teams, the Academic Leadership Circle (ALC) and the Holistic Individual Process (HIP). The ALC team is made up of the principal, assistant principal, special education coordinator, English as a second language coordinator, and the lead arts teacher. During their weekly meetings they discuss, assess and implement school policies and procedures. The HIP team is made up of the principal, assistant principal, bilingual guidance counselor, guidance counselor, paraprofessional, parent coordinator, and community associate. This meeting also meets weekly and is responsible for creating, implementing and maintaining school policies around student’s social and emotional growth.
- Teachers participate in grade and content level team meetings. The grade 9 and 10 teachers and students belong to the Sankofa team, and the grade 11 and 12 teachers and students are part of the Liberation team. These teacher teams meet monthly to collaboratively assess students’ work products. In addition, teacher teams meet weekly by department and bi-weekly with an administrator one-on-one. Teacher teams analyze student work from the school-wide 6 week assessment data as well as class projects. This data is used to revise unit/lesson plans. Teachers share best practices in department meetings, ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards, and embed the instructional shifts in their unit/lesson plans.
- During a teacher team meeting, teachers were observed conducting a skills analysis and planned to address the skills not yet mastered. For example, for the grade 11 English teachers identified that sentence variety, making inferences, and identifying themes warranted more time for whole-class instruction, and planned for instructional techniques that could be used to specifically address those skills. In the integrated co-teaching teacher team meeting, teachers were observed discussing students’ strengths and needs, and completing a goal and strategy graphic organizer to address the needs of each student.