

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Liberation Diploma Plus

High School K728

**2865 West 19th Street
Brooklyn
NY 11224**

Principal: April Leong

**Dates of review: May 8, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Isabel DiMola**

The School Context

Liberation Diploma Plus is a high school with 199 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 52% Black, 30% Hispanic, 16% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 57.3%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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	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	Well Developed

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

Findings

High expectations are systematically communicated to the entire school community including teachers, students and parents via several modes of communications. Effective communication places students on a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support high expectations across all constituencies result in a culture of mutual accountability between the school, students and families and promote an environment where all students have ownership over their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Articulation of high expectations as well as professional development lies in the domains of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and includes data-driven planning and purposeful pedagogic choices that make sense for students. It is expected that teachers plan for the individual needs of every student, not just academically, but social-emotionally as well. Professional development focuses on purposeful planning, effective questioning and promoting discussion in classrooms as well as how to engage students. Careful attention is paid to support teachers in meeting the needs of students that are over-aged and under credited with unique circumstances that resulted in interrupted education. Feedback to teachers includes clear meaningful next steps to improve practice resulting in effective and highly effective teaching for most teachers.
- The mission of the school lies in the idea of "Sankofa", an Akan work that means, "we must go back and learn our past to understand who we are today; thereby empowering ourselves to move forward." This adage drives the expectations for students. First and foremost, students are expected with the support of teachers, guidance counselors and school administrators to identify and acknowledge their behaviors and actions that led to their current circumstance. The school community promotes an environment where students are academically challenged and socially supportive to propel students toward reaching individual goals and build college and career readiness.
- High expectations for students include being well prepared for school, being responsible for academic work, demonstrating desirable personal behaviors such as respect, perseverance, determination and self-accountability. Teachers and administrators communicate with students via one-on-one conversation, guidance outreach and individual and group discussions to reinforce expectations and provide meaningful guidance on next steps. A graduating student explains, "The small school environment is really supportive, it helps us learn, we know what is expected and helps us cope with and navigate external issues that might distract us." A student new to the school shares, "Being here, I believe I can succeed; it has helped with my self-esteem and I believe that the teachers and the principal will not let me fall behind."
- Partnerships with parents begin during the intake process for students. At the initial meeting, both parents and students are presented with the school's program and are introduced to the expectations of the final portfolio students will present upon meeting the requirements for graduation. The portfolio is a collection of evidence to show that students are college and career ready and includes, but not limited to, college applications, thank you letters to employers, research to prepare two college snap shots and a resume. Parents are supported in the college application and in the Federal Student Aid process through workshops held by guidance counselors and one-on-one phone or in person meetings. The school's partnership with CAMBA allows for families to be supported with a variety of resources to help students keep the focus on their academic progress. Parent conferences, online access to information, phone calls and Parent-Teacher Association meetings keep parents informed and provide opportunities for partnering with the school on behalf of students.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While pedagogy provides consistent instructional supports including the use of strategic entry points and scaffolds to meet the needs of all learners, the use of questioning and discussion and the ability to foster structures for student to student development of deep reasoning independent of teacher direction varies across the school.

Impact

Students have opportunities to access content and demonstrate learning in a variety of ways and through various mediums. However, the inconsistent use of high quality questioning and extensions lead to missed opportunities for students to create work products demonstrating critical thinking in some classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Most classes demonstrate the use of appropriate entry points and scaffolds to engage all learners. For example, a mixed grade Algebra class provided for students to use Habits of Mind and visualize when solving problems using the Pythagorean Theorem. While some students independently sketched the situation presented, other students worked in pairs and small groups to discuss the problem before creating a visual representation of the problem. Other students worked with the teacher or a push-in tutor to begin the work. When solving the problem, students had access to calculators, formula cards and other manipulatives to support their learning.
- In all classrooms visited, teachers asked questions to elicit responses regarding content and learning targets. However, in only three of eight classes visited were questions used to stimulate student-led discussion. In the remainder of the classes, teacher-directed questions led to a teacher-student-teacher cadence of conversation.
- A review of student work in the vast majority of classes visited revealed consistent work in expanding student opportunities for writing, including argumentative writing where students state a claim and offer text-based evidence. Yet, in depth analysis of content and demonstration of high levels of student thinking were only evident in some classes and student work products. While some tasks and activities provide students with opportunities to create independent points of view using research and text evidence, some questions guide students to a preconceived point of view or way of thinking. In a US History class students were asked to be for or against abortion or the death penalty limiting their response to agreement of one side of the argument or the other and not allowing a more in depth study of the subjects. An English Language Arts assignment asked students how Edgar Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amatillado" creates a suspenseful plot leading students to the idea that the story does in fact contain the attributes of suspenseful literature, and not providing students with the opportunity to analyze the text and make an independent claim about the style of writing.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with units of study and tasks being planned and refined through the analysis of data and student work products.

Impact

The decision to purposefully focus on developing curricula that incorporates the instructional shifts is building coherence across classrooms and it provides students access to tasks that are highly engaging and that promote college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Refined units of study in all content areas integrate the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Planned strategies in unit plans include tiered academic vocabulary, multi-step problem solving, argumentative writing, and text-based responses. For example, a Global History unit of study articulates an essential question of "Have we succeeded in our quest for peace and well being?" and incorporates key learning points, content specific vocabulary, embedded performance tasks and a summative assignment that requires students to produce an argumentative writing piece supporting a claim and infusing a counter-claim within their writing on one of themes of the unit.
- Unit plans and lessons in all content areas incorporate academic tasks with multiple access points and scaffolds to meet the needs of all learners. For example, English language arts, science and Social Studies planning documents include the use of visual aids, tiered vocabulary, a variety of graphic organizers, sentence strips and leveled text, media and technology to provide access to all students.
- Planning is refined using data from student work and assessments including conference notes, exit slips, and formative and summative tasks allowing for all students including highest and lowest achieving, English language learners and special education students to have access to the curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging. Teacher plans evidence differentiated planning that articulate different scaffolds, activities and resources to engage individual and groups of students. These include flexible grouping, guided group activities, leveled readings, differentiated tasks and tiered problems, thus providing access for all students to the curriculum across subject areas.

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, the use of assessments, rubrics, student self-assessments, and ongoing checks for understanding allow for a clear portrait of student progress and mastery.

Impact

Through deep analysis of data gathered from various assessments and ongoing checks for understanding teachers consistently refine unit and lesson plans to meet student-learning needs and to provide students with information, thus making them aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across subject areas use multiple sources of data including Regents data, formative and summative assessment data, classwork and student conference data as well as cohort and attendance data to understand student learning and measure progress toward mastery of standards. At the end of each trimester, there is a detailed data analysis for individual students where outcomes and work products are evaluated against content specific rubrics. Unit and individualized planning is created based upon findings. Teachers use the data to offer students actionable and meaningful feedback and establish next learning steps for the current trimester's program.
- The use of rubrics for all tasks and activities provides students with clear expectations as well as an entry point for teachers to provide meaningful feedback. For example, feedback on a math task was specific stating, "In your explanations show specifically what values are the same, use the habit of mind as visualization to indicate arrows in problem 4 and to challenge yourself to continue to practice with relations/functions given in different forms." The student was able to explain what their next learning steps and demonstrated their progress during a conference with the teacher.
- Students in all classrooms use rubrics and self-assessments to identify next steps to inform their learning. Across all content areas, students reflect upon their work and the use of self and peer assessments allow for identification next steps necessary to reach and exceed standards. Individual conferencing with students is a tool to gauge the depth of student understanding of tasks and competence in using the Habits of Mind to expand learning. For example, a math conference log highlights a student working toward building the skills of persistence and self-management. Conference sheets reflect that the student and teacher created a goal and specifically articulated what the student needed to do and specified what the teacher would do to support the student's progress. Students complete a conferencing exit slip where they reflect on the usefulness of conference and gauge their clarity on next learning steps.
- Ongoing checks for understanding are evident in the vast majority of classrooms. These include conference notes, focus questions, exit slips, and teacher observations. Teachers collect data and modify instruction either during the course of the period or during follow-up lessons. For instance, during an Integrated Algebra lesson, the teacher was working one-on-one with a student, focusing on simplifying expressions with square root. The teacher used a series of questions to gauge the student's understanding and modified the problem to ensure that the student had an appropriate access point to be able to tackle the task.

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

All teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations that support analysis of classroom practice and assessments, and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), embedding processes that allow teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practice.

Impact

The work of the teacher teams has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence, improved teacher practice and student progress, and distributed leadership structures that affect learning throughout the school.

Supporting Evidence

- A core inquiry team that consists of representatives from each content area as well as a guidance counselor, an administrator and advisors from the school's partner community-based organization, CAMBA, meets weekly to evaluate student work, create protocols, policies and strategies to address areas of deficiency in teaching and learning. Through data analysis that includes academic and social-emotional outcomes, the team identifies students that are at risk, identify the personal behaviors where support is needed, that may include persistence, work habits or self-regulation, and create an individual action plan that addresses the student's needs. For example, a teacher asked that the team study a student that was having difficulty working with others in the class and who refused to read aloud or share work. The team created an action plan that allowed for the student to demonstrate learning via other mediums. The teacher then began to incrementally provide the student with opportunities for verbal participation, until the student became comfortable engaging in this manner in the class and with his peers.
- The use of protocols and procedures to analyze data and study student work products in all subjects results in all departments engaging in a continual process of revision of curricula to ensure rigor and opportunities for cognitive engagement. Each team articulates key implications and findings for data by answering questions that include, "What is the data telling us about student performance?" and "What are the implications of this data on instruction?" Teams look at outcomes through the lens of pedagogic practice and articulate that information to inform professional development needs.
- Teacher leaders collaborate with administrators in creating and implementing a professional development plan, receive support in building leadership skills, and are emerging as leaders of the professional learning within the school. During a teacher interview, teachers shared that they are valued by administration, felt they have an integral role in identifying school-wide trends, have opportunities to share best practices and offer input into school-wide decisions that include curricula revision, use of resources, and implementing strategies that expand opportunities for students.