



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Renaissance Leadership Academy

Middle School M286

**509 West 129th Street
New York
NY 10027**

Principal: Melisha Jackman

**Date of review: March 31, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Caron Martin**

The School Context

Renaissance Leadership Academy is a middle school with 177 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 61% Black, 36% Hispanic and 2% White students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 30% special education students. Boys account for 66% of the students enrolled and girls account for 34%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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 and teachers consistently communicate high expectations to parents and families in a variety of ways. Using the Danielson Framework for Teaching, school staff sustains school wide expectations that inform instructional guidance and support that prepare students for the next level.

Impact

Clear expectations and communication result in students, their families, and all teachers having a deep personal investment in the success of every student, informed by systematic progress checks resulting in clear next steps leading to improved learning for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- In addition to providing a staff handbook that communicates the school wide expectations, the principal also sends a weekly online newsletter prepared by school leaders to staff through Google Drive every Sunday evening. This document includes a recap of events that happened the week before and information on upcoming and current events. The document provides staff with announcements and expectations for each day of the upcoming week, serves as a conduit to recognize staff for exemplary practices and includes reminders about school wide systems and teacher accountability to those systems.
- Renaissance Leadership Academy (RLA) utilizes both an advisory model to support small groups of students assigned to a facilitating teacher and monthly “town hall” meetings. These student centered meetings take place before or during lunch. It is a time where leadership gathers to speak to each grade individually. Students are able to voice their ideas, ask and answer questions and respond to the conveyed message. RLA also encourages student voice through student led conferences. Following the observation of a student led conference, one teacher stated, “When we hear directly from the students what they think they need, we are able to collectively increase and optimize on instructional strategies to meet their stated challenges as well as what we observe through our data.”
- Parents report that teachers, guidance staff, and school leaders communicate by means that are appropriate and effective to inform them of student progress and are available to conference with them about particular issues or challenges. At least three parents stated that RLA pushes their students, specifically those with disabilities, to exceed learning expectations. Two parents of students with disabilities stated that due to the academic support their children have received, each child was in the process of being de-certified from special education services.
- The principal provides parents with multiple opportunities to meet and partner with the school regarding student progress or to assist in connecting parents with other community resources. Every month parents join the principal for coffee to engage in dialog, express their questions and share ideas they have for their child and/or the school community. Additionally, every Friday the computer lab is available for parents between 2:30 and 4:00 p.m. RLA’s parent coordinator and community director are there to support families with resume writing, emails, schoolwork and other support/research needs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

The school is beginning to use formative and summative assessment practices and checks for understanding more consistently to measure student progress towards goals across grades.

Impact

Although the school has created structures to gather data about student learning, these structures do not yet consistently lead to the necessary adjustments that address students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a variety of common assessments, including periodic assessments, unit tests in literacy and math, Measures of Student Learning (MOSL), and state assessments to track student progress and teachers use the resulting data to refine teaching strategies and target specific learning skills.
- Teachers monitor student understanding during lessons by asking students to make connections to the learning target by use of exit slips and thinking routines to elicit information about student understanding. However, teachers do not frame questions and prompts posed on exit slips in a manner to inform teachers of student progress. Examples include "How did today's group work help you understand the materials we covered in class?" or "Write one thing you learned from today."
- Across classrooms, teachers use ongoing checks for understanding, including asking and answering questions and student self-assessments. In a grade 7 English language arts (ELA) lesson, the extension to learning was "students who complete their essay response will be encouraged to grade it according to the rubric," not indicating that this is a common practice expected of all students, but only those who completed the essay.
- Across classrooms, teachers used or created rubrics as well as peer review rubrics and data trackers aligned with the school's curriculum. Feedback via rubrics, teacher notations written on student work and praise was evident. However, upon analysis of feedback, there was inconsistent evidence that feedback always provides actionable, meaningful next steps to students, such as "Mishel, your introduction is engaging...please continue to work on cohesiveness," and "Your process is clear, however I see a minor error, can you find it?"

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 with the integration of the instructional shifts. Teachers consistently emphasize critical thinking skills and analysis and they coherently plan for all learners across grades and subjects.

Impact

The curricular planning promotes coherence, which ensures that students are college and career ready. Tasks across grades and content areas encourage thinking for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly in department teams to develop curricula and appropriate learning targets using the Common Core Standards as a roadmap. The ELA team uses Scholastic's Code X, the common core based curriculum adopted by the city for use in middle schools, to guide its curriculum planning.
- Lesson plans and curriculum maps indicate that the school uses Common Core Learning Standards, Engage New York, and School of One as well as the core scope and sequence for social studies and science. The school employs the use of the workshop model across content areas, including flexible grouping based on student performance, literacy and linguistic abilities to promote student engagement.
- Literacy planning units emphasize citation of text-based evidence to support analysis of literary texts and story elements, determining themes or central ideas of informational text and author's purpose in informational text, including deepening comprehension and academic language acquisition. Planning also considers RLAs unique base groups, supported through weekly advisory, to address individual learning needs of all students including those with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs).

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is beginning to align teaching practices with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and teachers provide some instructional supports, however, the focus upon multiple entry points and the use of instructional shifts are inconsistent.

Impact

Since pedagogy is beginning to align practices that focus on the instructional shifts, the inconsistencies result in uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks that promote students' demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in their work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school believes that students learn best through nurturing close relationships and getting to know the whole child. RLA staff utilizes the “big data” from classroom and common assessments to push students to do their best.
- In all observed classrooms, teachers posed learning targets and essential questions on the board. Each classroom maintained a visually stimulating, print rich environment. However, in only three of the seven classrooms visited were students driving the conversation and engaged in higher level thinking skills. In a grade 8 social studies class, students seated in groups discussed their claims of why or why not World War II was not the war to end all wars. However, in a grade 7/8 integrated co-teaching (ICT) bridge class, the teacher stood in front of the classroom asking students questions to assess their understanding of the difference between chronological and sequential with the teacher asking all of the questions and the students answering them.
- While conversations with students and teachers indicated that student groupings are flexible and vary depending on tasks and content area, extensions to lessons were not always present or did not fully challenge learners, including students with disabilities. In the School of One math class, students worked on varying tasks and skill sets, yet it was unclear what options were available to extend their learning and deepen their understanding. All instruction was computer based although many students stated they still needed to refer back to demonstration lessons often, as well as think through tasks using paper and pencil, to understand what the teacher was asking them more clearly.

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

Across the school, teachers participate in structured inquiry-based teacher teams, which address the instructional focus and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams promote teacher leadership opportunities and a voice in key instructional decisions.

Impact

Inquiry-team collaborations are building teacher capacity that is leading to student progress. Distributive leadership structures enable teachers to make key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- RLA’s instructional leadership team facilitates classroom inter-visitation rounds based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teacher teams take turns visiting one another’s classroom to take low inference notes, and then use this evidence during a debrief meeting to address aspects of the focus of the visit. Each observing teacher provides feedback to the visited teacher to support or strengthen a specific instructional strategy.
- The school schedule supports common planning periods while also providing teachers additional time to meet and discuss curriculum, thereby ensuring alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.
- The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaboration through various teacher teams in the school. Teacher teams include the instructional leadership team, department teams, child study team, special education team, and attendance team. The principal stated and teachers reiterated that the ultimate goal of each team is to meet the needs of all learners and provide them with adequate supports and challenges to ensure that the school prepares all students for high school, college and their future careers.
- During one teacher team meeting, while discussing how the curriculum demonstrates rigor for students across grade levels and content areas, teachers stated that they receive an abundance of feedback on curriculum planning from the principal and then apply that feedback to their daily planning. One teacher stated, “I am the queen of rigor. There is nothing I don’t think these kids can’t do so we make sure we go over lessons together as a department, ensuring we push them and are challenging all students.”
- Each teacher has five to seven focus students who are identified based upon the data provided from the school quality guides, state assessments, Fountas and Pinnell and Mathematics Assessment Project (MAP) data. The teachers provide supports, evaluate work samples and use this information to facilitate discussions, which then lead to conversations with students, proposed interventions and progress monitoring of identified students that represent RLA subgroup populations.