Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Lower Manhattan Arts Academy

High School M308

350 Grand Street
Manhattan
NY 10002

Principal: John Wenk

Date of review: November 18, 2014
Reviewer: Eva Ostrum

The School Context

Lower Manhattan Arts Academy is a high school with 362 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 29% Black, 56% Hispanic, 4% White, and 9% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 34% of the students enrolled and girls account for 66%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Focus**	**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**	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff, and provide ongoing training aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching in response to collaboratively identified needs. The principal and staff have implemented systems of reciprocal feedback with families regarding student progress.

Impact
A culture of high expectations and professional development training provides support, and establishes a culture of mutual accountability for faculty and staff. An effective home-school partnership engages families in their child's preparation for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers confirm that school leaders and staff work together to define areas for professional growth, with an emphasis on teachers' expression of professional need. The professional development resulting from this collaboration aligns with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, teachers expressed a need for collaborative lesson planning. In response, the principal launched a professional development cycle on Japanese lesson study that included a presentation to the entire staff. Teachers then worked in teams to implement the Japanese lesson study model, focusing on planning instruction aligned closely with the expectations of Domain 1: Planning and Preparation in the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

- Teachers stated that the principal frequently visits classrooms to provide coaching support and feedback to them above and beyond contractually required observations. Teacher comments on the value of the principal's approach to coaching the staff included, "The principal is in our classrooms all the time, constantly giving us feedback. Because of him, I'm a good teacher", "I get so much input all the time," and "His criticisms are constructive. He always has really good ideas for me."

- The school partners successfully with parents to support student progress towards college and career readiness. Parents say that the school's main goal focuses on students having the drive and motivation to complete high school and go to college. Families receive frequent updates from the school about college through newsletters, Parent Association discussions, and direct communications from the principal. Parents stated that they and their children have opportunities to participate in college tours and the school's annual college fair, and cite this as evidence of the school's commitment to engaging with them and their children. "Here, it's like working as a team," the parent of a student with disabilities stated. "They email me, I email them. We work together. They provide me with all the information I need."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and faculty collaborate on the development of curricula and academic tasks that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards, and integrate the instructional shifts in planning for curricula and tasks that consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills. However, in a few classrooms, academic tasks did not provide opportunities for all learners, including English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD), to engage in college readiness tasks.

Impact
Curricular decisions build coherence and ensure that students have access to a coherent and rigorous curriculum to prepare them for college and career; however, while the curricula reflects planning to create access and cognitive engagement for a diversity of learners, some learners are not yet demonstrating high-level thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across content areas, unit and lesson plans provide evidence of planning for alignment with content standards. For example, a living environment unit that extends over four weeks aligns to 15 different standards from the New York State content standards, *The Living Environment: Core Curriculum*.

- In planning for the integration of the instructional shifts, literacy-based classes incorporate a balance of rigorous fiction and non-fiction texts into the curriculum, with an emphasis on citing textual references as evidence. For example, the lesson plan for a tenth-grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) class detailed a writing prompt on *The Kite Runner*: "Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as references drawn from the text." A ninth-grade global studies class detailed that students would read an excerpt from *The Histories*, by Herodotus, and then complete a task called "Investigating Primary Sources" to evaluate the factual accuracy of the excerpt.

- In classrooms visited, curricula and academic tasks emphasized rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills. For example, a twelfth-grade economics lesson plan outlined that students would "present on the determinants of supply and demand." An eleventh-grade math class lesson plan asked students to graph functions on their graphing calculators and then sketch them.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teachers have aligned teaching practices to the curricula in a way that reflects shared beliefs about how students learn and that aligns to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Student work and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact
Coherence in teaching practices support student engagement in rich discussions, and ensure that students produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Several aspects of teacher practice observed across classrooms align to Domain 3 in the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, in all classes observed, teachers communicated clear expectations, purpose, and directions to students about what they were doing and why (Component 3a of the Danielson Framework for Teaching). Across classrooms, student engagement in activities was the centerpiece of the lesson (Component 3c of the Danielson Framework for Teaching).

- Across classrooms, teacher practice reinforced a focus on the instructional shifts already embedded in the curricula. For example, consonant with the school's thematic focus on the arts, the dance teacher treated dance as text and continually asked students to revisit their interpretations to stay deeply connected to the text (New York State instructional shift 4). In a ninth-grade Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) math class, one of the teachers pushed students to focus on fluency with simple operations with fractions (New York State instructional shift 3).

- Student work products and discussions reflected high levels of student thinking and participation in classrooms visited. For example, in a ninth-grade global studies class, two students debated what made *The Histories*, by Herodotus, a primary source text. In a tenth-grade ICT English language arts class, students discussed alternative interpretations of the meaning of a quotation from *The Kite Runner*. In an essay for tenth-grade global studies on the Enlightenment, students discussed how the philosophies of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau differed from each other and refuted the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school uses common assessments to determine baseline performance, and to assess progress towards mastery of Regents-level skills. Across classrooms, teachers provide students with actionable feedback through comments on student work and accompanying rubrics.

Impact
School-wide data-driven decision-making ensures that teachers refine and revise curricula and academic tasks to meet student need, supporting growth in student performance.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use detailed rubrics and comments that provide students with actionable and precise feedback on how to improve their work. For example, as evidenced from samples in tenth-grade science and social studies, rubrics inform students of the necessary elements of each paragraph in an essay or component in a project and let students know which elements they need to develop further. Comments on student work that accompanied the essay rubric guided students to elaborate on background information and include additional citations from the texts under analysis.

- The English language arts and math departments administer a baseline assessment every September, followed by two formative and one summative assessment over the course of the school year. These common assessments provide actionable feedback to teachers that influence student groupings and Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies.

- Across all grades and core subject areas, every student takes a semester final that resembles a Regents exam, even if that particular course does not culminate in a Regents exam that year. This common assessment system that the school has developed system enables teachers and school leaders to track student progress towards attaining skills aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.

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

Findings
Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work to inform their practice and to move groups of students toward their goals. Distributed leadership permeates the school and gives teachers a platform from which to recommend strategies and approaches for teams to pilot.

Impact
The school's distributive leadership structure supports the implementation of teacher-developed innovative approaches that support struggling students in making significant progress.

Supporting Evidence

- In 2013-2014, the *905 Inquiry Team* was formed to investigate supports that would promote the academic achievement of a group of 17 ninth-grade students who were repeating their freshman year of high school. Team members analyzed data on attendance, behavior, and academic work to formulate strategies and interventions to support the students. By the end of the academic year, all students who had received the interventions had attained grade-level proficiency. The team continues to meet this school year to track individual progress as students complete tenth grade.

- English language arts teachers formed a *Vertical Alignment* team to design scaffolds for students and an accompanying blueprint for gradual release of responsibility to students as teachers removed the scaffolds.

- The full faculty meets with leadership every Friday. As a small school, leadership and faculty make many major decisions by consensus, with majority vote determining only some policy outcomes. The school conducts an annual retreat every spring for the entire staff. Structures such as these ensure that teachers have a voice in decisions that affect student learning. As one teacher stated, "we discuss, then try."