Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Renaissance School of the Arts

Middle School M377

319 East 117th Street
Manhattan
NY 10035

Principal: Dr. Brian Bradley

Date of review: March 30, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Alexandra Estrella

The School Context

Renaissance School of the Arts is a middle school with 167 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 43% Black, 57% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88.7%.

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	**Additional Findings**	**Developing**
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	**Additional Findings**	**Developing**
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**	**Developing**
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	**Focus**	**Developing**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing

Findings
School leaders and faculty are in the process of communicating and supporting a culture of high expectations for teaching, professional collaboration, and communication. School leaders and staff are beginning to develop structures to communicate high expectations to both families and students that are connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact
Across the school community, learning opportunities and feedback structures for all stakeholders are beginning to convey and communicate a set of high expectations towards ensuring increased progress toward college and career readiness for students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides ongoing, lines of verbal and written communication through PupilPath, parent-teacher conferences, workshops, emails, and notes backpacked home to inform families about their children's progress. Parents vocalized that teachers are accessible and communicate with them continuously during the designated Tuesday parent contact time. Parents also communicated that the school has provided various workshops and activities to assist them in supporting their children at home around Achieve 3000, College Bound, and Common Core Learning Standards. Parents are encouraging the school to implement more arts programs, and focused classes such as dance to be added to enhance students' experience, initiate creativity and self-expression given the premise of the school is centered on the arts.

- The school leader communicates high expectations for teaching and learning through trainings and coaching teachers around best practices aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the needs of students. This takes place through modeling, in-the-moment coaching cycles, and debriefs where feedback for shifts in teaching practice is provided. The school leader also communicates high expectations in the staff handbook, during staff weekly professional development meetings, and via email providing feedback from observations which commend positive work and identify areas of focus. Some of the feedback demonstrates growth in teacher performance.

- The professional development plan reflects how the school is working on communicating high expectations on professionalism, instruction, and Danielson Framework for Teaching to teachers. Teachers communicate that the school provides professional development through various structures such as mentor teachers and outside professional development opportunities. The school is in the process of developing other structures for ensuring classroom feedback aligns with these teacher trainings.

Area of Focus

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

Findings
Teachers participate on structured teacher teams targeting the school's instructional focus yet the staff is loosely utilizing an inquiry approach to analyze student assessment data and work.

Impact
The work of teacher teams is beginning to result in an integration of the Common Core Learning Standards to improve pedagogy, increase student progress on assessments, and strengthen instructional capacity.

Supporting Evidence

- The professional development team reviewed the professional development plan to make modifications to the calendar based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching domains where teachers needed further support. The team communicates that teacher surveys, choice, and recommendations from the administration based off of their observations determines the professional development. Although teachers are providing professional development as a result of the efforts of this team, there is no data that reflects the incorporation of tracking or cycles of inquiry into these meetings. Additionally, the review of student work and data toward developing stronger instructional practices are not reflected in school documents for this team.

- Teachers communicate that they utilize protocols to analyze student work and look at trends in order to make curriculum adjustments and identify what skills need to be retaught. Teachers report that adjustments are made to the scope and sequence after unit assessments are conducted and develop scaffolds to reach diverse learners. Although teachers communicate that they make adjustments utilizing assessment data during teacher team meetings, a review of school documents does not reflect continued improvement of practices or increased student progress.

- Special education teachers utilize the Degrees of Reading Power's quantitative data to assess students with disabilities with co-teachers to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The data demonstrates that students have not made increases in their growth and English language learner (ELL) student scores dropped in English language arts (ELA). The team ordered high interest books, engaged in reciprocal reading, and thinking maps as strategies to address student reading deficits. Although the team employed various strategies, school documents such as conferences notes, student journals and lesson plans did not indicate that they monitor the progress of students continuously to determine the impact of the strategies toward improving their reading scores.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing

Findings
The school is beginning to ensure that curricula in all subjects is accessible to a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards.

Impact
School leaders and faculty are starting to make purposeful decisions to ensure that curricula are promoting college and career readiness for all learners. The school is in the process of making curricula adjustments and modifications to ensure that tasks cognitively engage all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader communicates that curriculum maps are living documents and utilizes a process called the "Collegial Review" using teachers and the network staff to make adjustments to the curriculum. The school utilizes the Learning Centers Initiatives to assist in the development of curricula to align the Common Core Learning Standards to all subject areas. The GRASPS tasks, which stand for Goal, Real, Audience, Standard-Based, and Performance-Based, align to the instructional shifts in math as they contain real world application in problem solving.

- A review of lesson plans and tasks reflect activities where most students are required to complete the same assignment with minimal choice options to meet their individual academic needs. Some teachers are starting to include modifications of tasks to include scaffolds that support students' individualized needs as evidenced in a grade seven social studies class lesson plan where tiered tasks allow students the choice on how to demonstrate how the American Dream relates to them and their lives.

- To promote college and career readiness, the school has begun to focus on literacy and the promotion of critical thinking and communication skills. Word Generations, thinking maps, and sustained reading periods are resources and systems used to support reading skill development. Curricula reviewed reflects that every student reads four times a week and requires them to complete activities in their Just Right book based on their Degrees of Reading Power level to improve their reading skills.

- Lesson plans demonstrate a menu of strategies or leveled resources from which scholars utilize to better understand the subject matter. For example, an eighth grade science lesson plan shows the use of key vocabulary, higher order questions aligned to Depth of Knowledge (DoK), graphic organizers, student groups and document based activities to support students in building a better understanding of the subject matter.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, teacher practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and reflect the school wide beliefs of how students learn best informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and instructional shifts. Teacher practices across classrooms are inconsistent in providing scaffolds or questioning as multiple entry points into the curricula and in tasks for engagement.

Impact
The school is beginning to reflect teaching practices aligned to the school's set of beliefs. Teaching practices are in the process of leading to the demonstration of higher order skills and full engagement in challenging tasks for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, there were some scaffolds for various subgroups. In an eighth grade science class, students rotated and worked in stations to learn Newton's laws of motion. Groups were mixed heterogeneously based on assessment data to allow students to support each other as a scaffold. However, in many classes, students were provided the same task that did not provide scaffolds or possess a level of complexity to allow students to demonstrate higher order thinking, and serve as a challenge for the middle and upper-tiered students. In an eighth grade math class, all students were reviewing integers and math vocabulary by looking up the definitions. Students were paired together to support each other, but some students were unclear about the task, while others completed it quickly.

- During various classroom visits, there were some questions asked that could initiate discussion and enhance student thinking. However, several of the questions asked align to DoK Level 1 or Level 2, such as, "What force opposes the paper and what does it have to fight? What is SOLVE? What do they mean by our founding fathers?" In a social studies Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, students were engaged in discussion on the topic of the American Revolution and contributing to the American Dream. However, students could not demonstrate what they learned from each other or were not provided a challenging prompt by the teacher to further enhance student thinking.

- Across various classrooms, the instruction provided is teacher centered and promote some critical thinking aligned with DoK levels 3 or 4. In a seventh grade science class, students were asked to separate a mixture using physical processes. The teacher provided procedural step-by-step instructions of a task and then, provided students with handouts to complete. However, the teacher did not engage in the class in discussion, even when the opportunity presented itself to challenge student thinking. No modeling or simulation was provided by the teacher. The teacher did not use strategies to challenge the higher-tier students who finished their task early with no more work to complete.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings
The school's faculty has started to use common assessments across subject areas to determine student progress toward goals, yet inconsistently use ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment practices.

Impact
Data analysis is beginning to inform guided adjustments to units and lessons. Teachers inconsistently make effective in-the-moment adjustments during instruction to meet student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses interim assessment data, Degree of Power Reading results, unit assessments and scholarship data to make adjustments to curriculum and lesson plans. Interim assessments are given various times throughout the year and the data collected inform how students are grouped, curriculum and unit planning and modifications for all content areas. Degree of Power data reflects the progress of specific students and suggests interventions such as the use of Achieve 3000, Harvard Ed Labs books, and Wilson: Just Words.

- The student tasks observed were identical for most students based on a review of their work products and assessment data. For example, in an eighth grade classroom, students worked on the same task despite their proficiency levels. Some students completed the task early, while others struggled with the task. In a grade eight math lesson plan, the task demonstrated that the teacher made minimal modifications based on data for students with disabilities and for ELLs.

- Through tiered tasks, some teachers employ various strategies to check for understanding such as questioning strategies, "Do you agree or disagree?", "Show me how" prompts, and use of thumbs up and down. Although teachers were viewed checking for understanding, only some classes demonstrate the use of this type of formative assessment data to make in-the-moment adjustments during instruction. In a grade eight math class, a student presented and explained the process he utilized to solve the equation for the area of a cylinder. After the presentation ended, the teacher did not allow for clarifying questions or get a pulse from the students to gauge their understanding of what was communicated. Most students did not have the correct response for the questions on their papers, and the teacher did not reteach or provide another adjustment of the lesson.

- Teachers utilize rubrics, checklists, one-on-one conferences with notes, and exit tickets to monitor student progress and check for understanding during lessons. Student stated that they use their portfolio self -reflection sheets and that teachers provide support in their areas of need. A review of teachers' conference notes and student work indicate that in some cases, these types of formative assessment tools reflect instructional adjustments in how students are grouped and the type of activities provided to specific students.