Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

West Prep Academy

03M421

150 West 105 Street
Manhattan
NY 10025

Principal: Carland Washington

Date of review: January 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Roxan Marks

The School Context

West Prep Academy is a middle school with 198 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 54% Black, 37% Hispanic, 5% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 30% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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**	**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**	**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**	**Well Developed**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
The school ensures that expectations are clearly articulated to the community and members are mutually accountable to these standards. Guidance and advisement is provided through Titan Time and structures are in place to support students' social and emotional development.

Impact
The coordination of student supports and embedded practices to foster the development of social and emotional perseverance results in an environment of high expectations and a culture that promotes learning.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are communicated to staff through the handbook and specific components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching is explored deeply to ensure common language and beliefs are consistently demonstrated across the school. The professional development team created the plan that is aligned with current school goals to improve learning tasks, social-emotional development, engaging parents and promoting a school program that will attract diverse families to the school community. The professional learning plan is further divided with a focus on literacy, mathematics, social-emotional development, teacher development for instructional improvement and leadership development. School leaders continually review observation data, student level data and other sources to make effective adjustment to the professional learning plan.

- Teams of teachers and staff provide guidance supports and feedback to students to prepare them for the next level. The school uses Titan Time as its advisory period and has embedded other components to support students. Academic advisors or Titan Coaches use a system called Ruler to support social and emotional learning and assists students in developing skill and emotional intelligence. During the student interviews, one student commented, "the Ruler helps to think about their best self and regulate emotion, it helps my peers to maintain calm". Titan coaches also work with students on Student Led Conferences (SLC) and uses part of the advisory to prepare students to take ownership of their learning and be able to clearly articulate their grades and next steps needed to improve their education. For example, students in grades six and seven work on a website to highlight their best work which includes a reflection component and the creation of goals. Students in grade eight follow a similar process but the end product is written on paper.

- The school uses StrengthFinders 2.0 to identify innate assets in students and the results are used to guide planning of learning activities for students. Another tool utilized at the school is the Emotional Charter, an agreement that is developed collaboratively by students that outlines their aspirations about how to treat others in the community. The "Mood Meter" helps students to take ownership of their emotions and become cognizant of how changes in their feeling impact their actions. Parents commented on the positive influence of the Mood Meter and placed value on this tool that helps students especially during adolescent years. The school uses these tools and others strategies to ensure that students are in sync with their emotional conduct and use effective methods to manage their feeling in order to grow academically.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School beliefs about student learning are evident in classrooms and instructional methods are aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact
Instructional strategies and scaffolds for students are consistent across classrooms, allowing students to access learning in a meaningful way. However the development of high quality supports and extensions into the curricula to challenge and engage high achieving students are in progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and beliefs about student learning were reflected in classroom visits. The school has made a strong focus on teachers being explicit in identifying and displaying the learning target for students at the onset of lessons and teachers use Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and Blooms Taxonomy to provide the language used to develop these targets. This focus is directly linked to designing coherent instruction and engaging students in learning. Use of Thinking Maps support students in organizing their ideas and accountable talk sentence stems provide assistance for students during discussions. The use of technology to support instruction was evident throughout the school and most lessons observed used smart boards. Additionally, the focus on academic vocabulary, mood meters, process charts and posting of learning targets were consistently seen across classrooms.

- In an 8th grade mathematics lesson, students were applying knowledge of geometry to write and solve linear equations. Students were working in groups to solve different problems and creating an equation with the help of their peers. The teacher circulated among the groups and asked questions to ensure students were confident in their results. A mid-lesson refocus of the groups was provided to students and the teacher inquired about prior connections with other lessons. Students were using mathematics language during discussions at the tables and were highly engaged in this learning activity.

- During a 6th grade humanities lesson, students were synthesizing information from multiple sources to explain why governments rise and fall. The teacher supported students by identifying key vocabulary necessary to assist them while they compared and contrasted different governing structures. One student in each group was responsible for facilitating the group work as the teacher circulated and recorded observations garnished from discussions. Students were supported through the discussion by accountable talk stems that were displayed for students to use as a scaffold.

- In an integrated co-teaching 7th grade lesson, students were determining the central idea of a text and citing information from multiple sources as they delved into the impacts of the Three Fifth Clause. Questions posed varied from low to high cognitive levels and graphic organizers were created for students to expand on the reason, evidence, and analysis as well as to focus on the counterclaim and evidence that disproves the argument. The teacher prepared a checklist to guide students as they completed the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school uses New York State assessment data to identify common core power standards that are incorporated in the units of study throughout the year and instructional shifts. Scope and sequence is created and tools were designed to support students in accessing the curricula.

Impact
The curriculum is aligned to New York State Common Core learning standards and provides access for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school identifies power or priority standards and ensures the instructional shifts are embedded in units of study. Atlas Rubicon is used for teachers to publish units they create and to ensure units developed include higher order thinking and academic rigor; school administration reviews and provides feedback to teachers. Teachers College consultants support staff with adjustments to the writing curricula. Professional development is available to support teachers as they revise units. Collectively, teachers have agreed to use a lesson plan format aligned with Danielson that includes the learning target, instructional outcome, standards addressed, resources, academic vocabulary, do now, mini-lesson, group/independent work, share outs and reflection. The lesson plan template also includes questions and assessment including exit tickets and a section for teacher notes.

- Review of unit plan documents show clear goals and standards listed at the onset of the unit. There is a section entitled transfer goals, where students will connect their learning while using this new knowledge to deepen understanding on the content. Essential questions, understanding, skills and knowledge are clearly outlined in plans. Assessments including projects are delineated as well as learning plans and events. All units include progress monitoring such as daily do now's, exit tickets, essays, quizzes and thinking plans. The school provides teachers with a literacy toolbox of resources and strategies that are used to support students to activate, organize, comprehend, summarize and apply learning.

- The school uses modules from EngageNY and supplements with material from CMP3 for mathematics instruction. Students in grades six and seven are provided with Humanities instruction based on units designed by Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and social studies content aligned to NY state standards and follows NYC scope and sequence. In grade eight students are exposed to English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies as two distinct subject areas. The English language arts and Humanities units place an emphasis on text-based answers and writing from sources.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school uses data to identify priority standards to address in unit plans, detect gaps in content knowledge and provide students with clear feedback and next steps in learning. Teachers use data to plan strategy groups and assessments guide adjustments to lessons.

Impact
The use of common assessments aligned to common core learning standards provides teachers with information to adjust curricula and inform student groups.

Supporting Evidence

- Formal assessment are administered quarterly for all core subject areas and benchmark assessment in the fall provides data that informs academic intervention services including IXL Math, Wilson Reading System as well as enrichment Regents classes. The school creates a detailed analysis of at risk students and compiles a plan that identifies the learning gaps and established clear expectations for next steps. The At Risk Plan covers mathematics, science and humanities and teachers provide details about current performance, evidence and academic expectations.

- The school created a protocol for examining data looking closely at the standards, identifying strengths, problems of practice and a section to reflect on key conclusions. Performance series assessment, EngageNY and common assessment are developed to mirror the state exam and require that students explain their thinking in all content areas tests. The school also created an independent reading conference form that allows teachers to indicate a focus for the student including strengths and future teaching points.

- During a classroom visit the teacher uses various ways to check for understanding including repetition, thumbs up, and monitoring responses of students during turn and talk activities. Do now activities are utilized by teachers to assess the prior day lesson objectives to ensure students fully comprehend the learning target. Exit tickets are used to verify students have a thorough grasp of content and teachers use the results to make adjustments to lessons. Teachers relayed that the end of unit tests are used to plan re-teaching and identify students who require academic intervention services.

- The school leaders in collaboration with teachers developed subject specific department trackers to measure progress towards goals using assessment data and students work. These plans include periodic benchmark for December, February and May and outlines clear next steps for staff and evidence to assess whether the benchmarks are met.

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

Findings
All teachers participate in structured collaborations focused on enhancing their practice and increasing their capacity to ensure the delivery of rigorous standards based instruction. Through participation in Learning Labs and instructional rounds, teachers use the Danielson rubric to engage in peer assessment.

Impact
The work of teacher teams has increased the instructional capacity of teachers resulting in mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders ensure that time is allocated in the schedule for various configurations of teacher teams to collaborate. It is an expectation of the school culture that teachers work together to ensure standards based instruction inclusive of the key instructional shifts are evident in their practice. Norms and goals are established for all teams and various protocols are used based on the expressed needs of the group.

- Grade level teams review and assess student work products for students that they share and identify specific students that require additional support and intervention. The school has a large population of students with disabilities and there is time allocated for these teachers to meet on Tuesdays. Department teams meet weekly to address content area items that can impact other grade levels. All teams examine data, analyze lesson plans and work on modifying units based on power standards and current assessment data. Teacher teams create assessments and use this time to interpret formative assessments leading to decisions that inform instructional shifts.

- A key aspect of the school is the Learning Lab, a peer observational initiative for teachers to work together and participate in peer observations focused on components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This professional learning activity is geared to increase the knowledge of teachers in understanding exemplar and effective practices that will improve their pedagogy resulting in improved student achievement. Teachers focus on specific components of the rubric and identify key aspects of practice that makes a teacher highly effective. Teachers visit classrooms together while taking low inference observation data specific to a component of the rubric. The visit is followed by a debrief session and collectively the group shares evidence and provides warm and cool feedback. The visiting teachers reflect upon their own practices and plan how they will make adjustments to their own pedagogy. The host teacher is videotaped and only uses the recording for self-reflection.

- Teams of teachers consistently meet to review various kinds of data while looking closely at lesson plans and make adjustments to the intervention plans for student in their charge. Student progress in communicated using the skill tracker and modifications to current intervention services are decided at the teacher team level. Based on the Performance Series assessment, students made an average of .46 growth in grade level equivalence in mathematics and .35 growth in ELA from October to December. As a small learning community, teachers know their students well and the various opportunities for them to meet afford them to have meaningful dialogue with colleagues about the students they share.