Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Choir Academy of Harlem

05M469

2005 Madison Avenue
New York, NY
10035

Principal: Lennel George

Date of review: January 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Fred Walsh

The School Context

Choir Academy is a secondary school with 78 students in grade eight, eleven and twelve. The school population comprises 71% Black, 28% Hispanic, 0% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 31% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 85%.

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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations regarding the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers make decisions regarding instructional practice, pedagogy and teacher capacity.

Impact

Collaborative inquiry team work is resulting in opportunities for shared leadership, improved teacher practice and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- On Wednesday afternoon teachers meet to analyze and discuss student work products and how teaching strategies impact outcomes. For example, at a weekly whole faculty teacher meeting, teachers were engaged in a discussion around implementing Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts required to meet standards. The meeting was facilitated by social studies and English language arts teachers who presented samples of students work for all members to review. Writing samples were selected for students performing in the lowest 3rd percentile. It was determined that peer-to-peer editing, as an instructional approach, resulted in a dramatic improvement in a student's writing.

- Wednesday teacher meetings have a shared rotational leadership structure. Meetings are facilitated each week by different teachers, across subjects and grades to ensure a collective approach to meeting student needs. Teachers articulated that by rotating roles on the team, they are developing leadership skills and content expertise across grades and disciplines. Teachers articulated that school leaders value teacher input when making curricular decisions. They pointed to the positive impact on learning that these decisions are having on students with disabilities and reluctant learners.

- Teachers spoke of how they are empowered by the principal to create school-wide improvement initiatives, set goals and identifying school's instructional focus. For example, teacher input and collaboration with the principal regarding student discipline and programming has resulted in an improved school tone.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact
Although teaching practices are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, student involvement in lesson activities was largely passive and inconsistent in demonstrating high levels of thinking for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher practice in questioning and discussion is emerging. During an English language arts lesson, students read and discussed the main idea and points to be included in a summary for the poem, “Death Be Not Proud”. Participation in group discussions was led by a few students, while others listened passively. During a social studies lesson, in which the task and discussion centered on current events, and how they connect to past events, questioning was teacher-directed, without the opportunity for student-to-student discourse.

- In Algebra 2 / Trigonometry, French lessons, and English language arts lessons, teacher’s checks for understanding were uneven, with some student questions overlooked. Questions were of a low cognitive level and answers were repeated by the teacher for the class to hear. For example in an eleventh grade French class, the teacher asked all questions in English; “What do we do to turn it from positive to negative? Is it a subject or a verb?” Single word responses from students were accepted and repeated by the teacher, leaving the majority of students unengaged.

- Across classrooms student engagement was inconsistent—with some students actively involved in activities and others off task or disengaged. Lesson pacing was not explicit in the curriculum documents or lesson plans reviewed. As a result, some lesson activities dragged on while others were rushed. In some classes the pacing was so slow that students had a considerable amount of down time. For example, in a physical education class, students were expected to conduct a series of exercises during the first half of class. However, the remainder of the period was allocated to unstructured, open play time with few students meaningfully engaged.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing

Findings

Curricula and academic tasks reflect planning and emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills inconsistently.

Impact

Curricula are beginning to provide students access to cognitively engaging curricula and tasks; however, students with disabilities have limited access to rigorous tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- In curricular documents reviewed, rigorous tasks were inconsistent. For example, an 8th grade integrated collaborative teaching (ICT) unit plan for English language arts required that students analyze strategies authors use to develop and support the idea of "survival", over a lengthy, seven week period. For the unit's culminating task, students were to write an objective summary of life in extreme environments using two texts, thus, not adequately emphasizing higher order thinking and writing skills.

- Across subjects, lessons and units inconsistently include access, varied resources or differentiated teaching strategies to cognitively engage students with disabilities. For example, in a French language unit titled, "Foundations in Writing", student choice, instructional technology, cognitively engaging questions and peer-to-peer and student self-assessment are explicitly included to address the needs of diverse learners. An algebra 2 / trigonometry lesson observed, and corresponding lesson plan, required that students add and subtract matrices. There was little evidence of how units and plans in math or science account for diverse learning styles to provide access.

- Curricular documents reviewed, across grades and subjects, showed little specific evidence of how students with disabilities are provided access to the curriculum. In French, choral music, and social studies Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies are identified; however, mathematics units did not include multiple entry points or ways for students to access the material.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms teachers use or create assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are loosely aligned to curricula. Teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact
Students receive limited feedback on how they can improve their work. Teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet student's learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teacher's use of ongoing checks for understanding was limited. In an eighth grade English language arts class with four students and two teachers, students received feedback on completion of the task, rather than the quality of their written work. In a second eighth grade English language arts class with four students present and two teachers, students worked in pairs, assessing their writing. Although the teacher monitored the conversation between students, a misunderstanding of paragraph structure and organization was missed. In a mathematics lesson a student was unaware of the term, quartile. The teacher continued without addressing the student's question.

- Students articulated that they received inconsistent feedback on assignments and were not clear on how to improve on their work. For example, in mathematics and English language arts classes, students were unable to articulate how their participation in class discussions or completion of class assignments were graded or how they could improve their grades on those criteria.

- The school has created rubrics aligned to specific tasks; however, their use as a way to improve student outcomes is uneven. Graded student work with corresponding rubrics and feedback was displayed in classrooms and hallway bulletin boards. Nevertheless, student understanding, of how work is graded, or how teacher feedback improved their work was inconsistent. For example, the school has a class discussion rubric, however it was not referenced by the teacher during discussion time, nor could students identify how to use the rubric or how they were graded on the discussion.

- In a teacher meeting, teachers discussed peer-assessment as a valuable instructional tool; however its implementation is an emerging practice across classrooms. Peer assessment was observed in two eighth grade English language arts classes observed.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

High expectations are consistently messaged to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, in trainings and meetings. Parents and students are routinely informed on student progress and understand the school's expectation for college and careers.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations build buy-in and accountability amongst staff, students and their families, thus providing training, support and feedback towards understanding student progress and preparing students for college and careers.

Supporting Evidence

- Frequent classroom observations and feedback from classroom visits hold staff accountable for implementing research-based, teacher practices. Teachers reported they receive timely and accurate feedback on teaching. For example, observation reports reviewed showed timely feedback to teachers in the area of questioning, student engagement and use of assessment in instruction. Teachers stated they receive professional development on instructional practice and youth development topics. For example, staff received training on the topic of emotional intelligence.

- Parents shared that teachers regularly send updates on their child's progress with frequent phone calls and emails. The school provides parent workshops on college and career readiness. Students participate in college fairs and visits throughout the year.

- All seniors are programmed for a College preparedness course which meets twice per week. Counselors, teachers and administration provide college advising to juniors and seniors to increase college awareness and assist with the entire application process

- Students reported that the work is challenging in most subjects and teachers' expectations for classroom conduct, class assignments, and participation are high. Students articulated the school's expectation is that all students will attend a distinguished, four year college.