



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Voyages South Transfer School

High School Q261

**156-10 Baisley Boulevard
Queens, NY 11434**

Principal: Chris Losurdo

Date of review: November 26, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Beverly Ffolkes-Bryant, Ed.D.

The School Context

Voyages South is a transfer high school with 150 students. The school population comprises 61% Black, 24% Hispanic, 4% White, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 68.2%.

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	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	Proficient
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	Proficient
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:	Proficient
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Findings

The school maintains a supportive learning environment that conveys high expectations to students, parents and staff.

Impact

This supportive learning environment impacts positively on students taking ownership over their own learning and being prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents expressed great satisfaction with the way the school communicates its expectations for their children’s learning. They shared that they are comfortable talking to the counselor and feel they listen to what parents have to say. Parents also stated that the school communicates their children’s progress through emails, telephone calls and student progress reports that occur daily through phone calls or monthly through progress reports. This give parents a forum to voice their concerns as it pertains to their children’s education and offers them suggestions for how they can help to better the school. Professional development workshops for parents have included such topics as the Common Core Learning Standards, Financial Aid for College, Financial Literacy, How to Help My Young Person to Make Better Decisions, as well as tips to help their child improve their academic skills at home. There is also a monthly newsletter published by the students that informs them of the units taught in classes. Parents each receive a copy of the student handbook that includes basic school information. This work is helping students achieve more positive outcomes as evidenced by the rise of attendance data as well as Regents scores.
- High expectations for teaching and learning are communicated by the principal through his brief morning “huddle-up” meetings where he meets daily with teachers before the beginning of the day. The meetings capture any safety items, school-wide events as well as The Flow of the Day. This helps the teachers to stay focused on the daily implementation of best pedagogical practice linked to improved student outcomes. Teachers routinely meet to collaborate on and across department teams outside of structure sessions, discussing pedagogy and brainstorming next steps and adjustments to plans for individual students.
- Instructional rounds are routinely scheduled throughout the year. While the principal routinely accompanies teacher teams, teachers head up these rounds. The rounds consist of five-ten minute classroom visits using a predetermined lens to note implementation of best practices with special emphasis on the implementation of strategies shared at professional development sessions. Feedback to teacher from colleagues has resulted in deeper impact and stronger instructional practice. These initiatives ensure a shared commitment to the school’s high expectations and goals.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching strategies are somewhat aligned to the curricula, are beginning to reflect a shared set of beliefs about how students learn best and occasionally provide multiple entry points for students to access lessons and units, but these are not yet consistent school-wide practices.

Impact

Students are not consistently provided with multiple entry points into the curricula, leading to missed opportunities to support and engage all learners in meaningful work.

Supporting Evidence

- According to the principal's School Self Evaluation Form, classroom practices are based on the Guided Learning Books, which provide students with scaffolded instructions to guide them through the steps of an activity or project. This program also provides teachers with differentiated lessons, accessible content, interdisciplinary connections and an infusion of language development techniques throughout all classes. However, most classroom instruction observed provided one activity for all students regardless of their performance level or learning style. As a result, the individual learning needs of students are not consistently targeted and higher achievers are not sufficiently challenged.
- In his *Clear Vision for Voyages South 2014-2015*, one of the principal's instructional expectations is Higher Questioning and Thinking. Part of this was for teachers to plan and incorporate various Level 3 and 4 questions into lessons by utilizing the Depth of Knowledge rubric developed by Norman Webb. However, in classes observed, teachers primarily asked students lower level recall questions. It is therefore unclear if the current strategies are setting a path towards mastery of skill and content for all groups of students.
- Even though across classrooms observed, most teachers were implementing various instructional strategies and there was student engagement and discussion, it was not evident in all classrooms. Similarly, student work did not show consistent evidence of tiered supports to ensure reliable progress for struggling learners.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Through regular use of relevant data, the principal and faculty have an ongoing understanding of the performance and progress of individuals, by tracking individual progress within the context of different groups and subjects.

Impact

The systems to monitor progress through data analysis are used regularly to guide adjustments in units and lessons to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school created an individual education plan for every student that states how many credits they need to graduate and is updated every marking period. The plan also has a date when students have to take Regents examinations. The school uses an online Regents and Lab tracker for each student. Groups of students who require intervention based on their plan work with staff during lunch and in afterschool tutorials in order for their needs to be addressed.
- Based on the recommendations from the 2013-2014 New School Quality Review, the principal revamped the school's grading policy. Their universal grading rubric now includes 55% of a given grade based on assessments, projects, homework and work inside the class; 15% based on progress and preparedness, including attendance; 15% based on citizenship and work habits and 15% based on subject mastery. Teachers are required to give a cumulative assessment at the end of each marking period and points are deducted for absences. The system is not only comprehensive for staff; it also enables members of the learning community to interpret data to make informed decisions about resource allocations, teaching strategies and student grouping. This new assessment practice offers transparency as well as opportunities for teachers and inquiry teams to analyze trends and provide actionable feedback to students, all of which results in meaningful and useful information on instructional practice.
- Based on the recommendations from the 2013-2014 New School Quality Review that said to, "Further develop systems to analyze varied assessment results so that teachers accurately identify skills gaps and their causes to ensure valid instructional adjustments that lead to increased student achievement," it is now the school's expectation for every teacher to use checks for understanding for students that include conferencing, summary paragraphs, exit tickets or checklists. Teachers are to pull from this "toolbox of strategies" when planning their lessons. For example, in one English class observed where students were learning how to write an argumentative essay, the teacher distributed an assessment time sheet where student had to use the topic they selected the day before and apply the concepts learned to create their own effective introduction. They also had to rate their understanding of the lessons on a scale of 1-10. The principal reported seeing teachers using these strategies more in his classroom observations and seeing his teachers adjusting their lessons more as a result of the student responses. This has led to teachers making more highly effective instructional decisions, resulting in improving student performance.

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

Teachers across the school welcome opportunities to participate in distributive leadership structures and professional collaborations that foster reflection.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved student progress on assessments, and shared leadership structures build capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The administrative team is the main data team of the school, made up of the principal and the teacher leaders of both the interdisciplinary and content area teams. School leaders provide team leaders with analyses from scholarship reports, credit accumulation, attendance data, Regents line item results, formative assessment, Student Transcript and Academic Recording System (STARS) intake assessments and progress towards graduation and the correlation among several data points. They then make inferences and also provide teachers with a data-based intervention protocols developed by the leadership team to use when sharing data. Team leaders share the action plans with administration and other team leaders who then provide feedback and recommendations.
- Based on last year's Regents examinations results, the inquiry focus this year for the department teams is literacy, since students are being admitted to the school with very low reading levels. It is the principal's belief that improving students' reading skills will help content area learning. At the English team meeting, teachers analyzed the data to create interventions for those students who scored the lowest on their English Regents. After reviewing this data, teachers modified their instruction to meet students' needs. By looking at the student work to identify needs, teachers learn strategies from their team members and collaborate to brainstorm ideas that would address the targeted students' needs. For example, one teacher suggested incorporating graphic novels to help students understand the main idea and details while another teacher suggested having one student use a computer to help her to better see and listen to the text. These practices have helped to build a reflective, collaborative community that plans cohesively and shares best practices to close student learning gaps.
- The principal introduced a student work protocol as a tool for focused conversation around looking at student work. This protocol template includes the Guided Learning Booklet topic, the Depth of Knowledge questions, the student answers to those questions, and teacher reflection and feedback. This ensures coherence and consistency across all departments throughout the school as well as builds a reflective community that focuses on improved student learning. All teacher teams are required to use this protocol, which ensures coherence and consistency throughout the school. Furthermore, teams are able to look at student work in depth and reflect on implications for improving student skills and knowledge.

Findings

The principal and teachers are working to align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and inconsistently ensure that lessons and tasks emphasize rigor and higher-order thinking.

Impact

Unit and lesson plans provide engaging, rigorous curricula that promote higher-level thinking in some but not all classes, leading to missed opportunities to support a variety of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Based on the fact that students coming to the school have lost major amounts of instructional time, the school has prepared Guided Learning Books as a systematic way for teachers to prepare lessons. These booklets are based on curriculum maps, the citywide scope and sequence and the instructional shifts of the Common Core Learning Standards. Pacing calendars show the priority skills on which each department is to focus on based on item analysis from Regents scores and the STARS intake assessments. This is happening in many, but not all departments.
- The school is a Transfer High School with students coming in with major credits lost and with various learning needs, the academic tasks observed in classrooms showed some evidence of planning to engage these students.
- The school has purposefully aligned their curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards and the principal has also given the Depth of Knowledge rubric to enable teachers to plan rigorous student work products as well as analyze and critique student work. Student work observed in classrooms and hallways sometimes pushed students' thinking and encouraged academic growth in those instances.