



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Excelsior Preparatory

High School Q265

**143-10 Springfield Blvd
Queens
NY 11413**

Principal: Lilly Narine Lucas

**Date of review: April 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Renee Peart-Zachary**

The School Context

Excelsior Preparatory is a high school with 492 students from grade 9 through 12. The school population comprises 85% Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% White, 3% Asian, 1% American Indian and 2% other students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88.0%.

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	Well Developed
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		
<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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate to staff high expectations that are aligned to Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to students and their families that are connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Staff awareness of school-wide expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability. Partnerships with families result in parents' awareness of student progress and learners, including all subgroups, own their educational experience, and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate instructional expectations through observation conferences, and professional development on topics such as Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK), instructional focus of writing across subjects, and Danielson Framework for Teaching with a focus on 1e: Designing Coherent Instruction, and 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques. School leaders hold teachers accountable for expectations through conferences with teachers on scholarship data and end of the marking period meetings to review the Plan for Success, which is a student academic action plan. Furthermore, teachers hold each other accountable for instructional expectations through inter-visitations where they visit their colleagues' classrooms and provide each other with feedback via Google Docs. When teachers visit their peers' classrooms, they answer questions aligned to Danielson Framework and collect low inference data that is shared via email, one-to-one discussions, and in teacher team meetings.
- The school provides college and curricula information to the parents through workshops on topics, such as financial aid and the college application process, and through events, such as curriculum night. Parents can access their child's grades, homework, and projects as well as contact the teachers via Skedula-PupilPath, an online grading system. Teachers meet and call parents daily to keep them apprised of their children's academic progress. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in conjunction with the college advisors provide ongoing workshops to parents on college information as well as how to successfully communicate with a teenager. One parent said, "I have recommended this school to a friend because it is Queens' best kept hidden secret." A second parent said, "This staff really cares and my child is ready for college because of them." A third parent said, "This school is like a family and the staff works hard to make sure our kids are successful."
- Students take college trips, Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) preparation classes, and meet with their advisors to review transcripts and college applications. Furthermore, students have opportunities to participate in the Gateway Program, a National Honor Society program and take college classes through the College Now program where they can earn college credits while still in high school. Students own their educational experience by constantly reviewing transcripts, monitoring graduation action plans, and using Skedula to communicate to teachers on daily tasks and projects. One student said, "I know exactly what I need to graduate. I review my transcript with my advisor and on my own." A second student said, "I'm ready for college because I have been preparing since the ninth grade and now I am a senior. I have been tracking my progress since ninth grade."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the instructional focus, reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best, and provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Across classrooms, discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and contribution.

Impact

Shared teaching practices are emerging into consistent discussions at the team and school levels. High-quality supports and extensions into the curricula so that all learners, including low, mid and higher achievers are engaged in challenging tasks where discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and ownership are evolving school-wide.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders stated that the school's instructional focus is based on writing across content areas to support claims, generating a hypothesis, posing arguments, and solving real world problems. School leaders also stated their shared beliefs are aligned to teachers using Webb's DOK questions to engage students in high level discussions where they explain their claims, counterclaims, and real world problems. This shared belief was evident in 5 out of 7 classes. The shared belief and discussions at the team and school levels are advancing school-wide as evidenced by the teacher interview and a review of teacher team agendas.
- In a grade 9 Integrated Co-Teaching English class, students were reviewing what makes a sonnet poem unique. Students reviewed vocabulary terms, and the teacher conducted a shared reading of a Shakespearean sonnet. Some students were given an annotated copy of the poem as well as vocabulary words with definition for support. In a grade 9 Earth Science class, students were grouped heterogeneously based on their skill sets to conduct a lab on how to model how the half-life of a radioactive isotope can be determined. In a grade 11 English class, students were examining character traits of *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The teacher included the use of modeling, verbal and written prompts, and whole class discussion to provide multiply entry points into the lesson. While classrooms visited provided some evidence of high quality supports, it was not consistently evident across all classrooms visited.
- Although there was some evidence of students participating in high-level discussions across classrooms visited, student ownership of high-level discussions was evident in only three out of seven classes. For example, in a grade 12 English class, students discussed the essential question referring to Nat Turner and the idea of what makes a martyr. Students discussed their viewpoints about current event topics and how it affects African Americans. Students took ownership in the discussions by responding to their peers claims. This high-level discussion was led by students. A student said, "I disagree with you because if we want to see the future we must look behind us, so we must exam our past to understand events like Trevon Martin." In a grade 10 Global Studies class, students were discussing Gandhi's method of civil disobediences. Students were observed in small group discussions supporting their claims. Student ownership of high-level discussions is maturing school-wide.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that coherent curricula and rigorous academic tasks are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

All students, including low, middle and higher achievers, have access to the curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging, promote college and career readiness, and emphasize higher-order skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use a unit plan template to create plans that include Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts with a focus on writing from sources, evidence to support a claim, and deep conceptual understanding. Additionally, the unified unit plans include the school's coherent teacher-created instructional strategies of Restate, Answer, Find Example, Tie it Together (RAFT) and Identify Analysis, Application and Synthesis (IAAS Maps) to promote college and career readiness.
- Coherent tasks build on critical-thinking skills for all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and special education students. For example, in a physics task, students are asked to research and describe the historical development of the concepts of gravitational, electromagnetic, weak, nuclear, and strong nuclear forces. In a global task, students are asked to analyze how China Qin and Zhou dynasties affected China's society today. In a Living Environment task, students are asked to summarize and compare the process of photosynthesis and respiration as well as research and explain the difference between autotrophs and heterotrophs. In lesson plans and unit plans reviewed, all tasks asked learners to use the Position, Answer, Counterclaim and Explain (PACE) strategy in their essays. The coherent use of PACE strategy promotes higher-order skills for all students including low and high-level achievers.
- Across grades and subjects, teachers use Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) assessments and student work products to adjust the curricula to meet all students' learning needs including students above, on, and below grade level standard. For example, based on the MoSL baseline assessments, teachers on the math team noticed that students needed more support in Geometry with volume and surface area formulas. In turn, they revised the Geometry unit to include re-teaching different formulas, adding writing to explain answers, and added specific modifications, such as visual and graphic organizers for selected students. The science team reviewed MOSL baseline assessments and noticed they needed to revisit topics, such as cell organelles, cell membrane, and photosynthesis and selected learners needed text in chunks while enrichment learners needed additional projects and experiments. Furthermore, a review of lesson plans across grades and subjects revealed that curricula have been adjusted to include modified tasks for students below, on, and above standard level.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers use assessments and rubrics that are aligned to the school’s curricula. Teachers uses common assessment results to establish student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

The teachers’ assessment practices provide actionable feedback to students and assessment data informs teachers on what adjustments are made to curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use MoSL assessments, teacher-created and MoSL rubrics to provide actionable feedback to students. A review of student work products on classroom and hallway bulletin boards revealed that learners receive actionable feedback. For example, in a math class, learners receive feedback such as “I enjoyed your written explanation in which you used mathematical terms. However, please show your work and make sure to list all steps and check your work.” In an English class, the teacher gave actionable feedback that said, “This is a great observation. I’d like to see your annotation so I can see your thought process.”
- In the student interview, students reported that across subjects, all teachers review and give rubrics before they complete a task. Students also reported that teachers give them feedback on their work products that connect to the rubric. One student said, “When I get my work back from my teachers, I always understand what I did wrong and what I could do to get a better grade.” A second student said, “The rubrics helps me understand how to get a high score and my teachers always write out what they would like to see in my next assignment.”
- Teachers use MoSL assessment results to determine what should be re-taught in classes as well as in the after-school program. Students reported that teachers will give up their lunch and stay after-school to help students meet their learning goals. Across the school, teachers analyze data and adjust forthcoming lessons based on the findings of the data. For example, the social studies team reviewed MoSL baseline assessments and made instructional adjustments by reviewing document-based questions and re-teaching students how to support their argument. Based on the adjusted instruction in social studies, the school has seen an improvement in student achievement as evidenced by 33% more students passing the 2015 United States(US) History Regents when compared to results of the 2014 US History Regents.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured collaborations that have improved teacher instructional capacity and promote the implementation of the school's instructional focus. Teacher leadership structures are embedded so that teachers play an integral role in instructional decisions.

Impact

The work of the teacher inquiry teams results in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Teachers integral instructional role with school leaders affect student-learning school-wide.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly in inquiry meetings where they review select student work products and MoSL data. Teachers selected the bottom third students for inquiry-based work. They use an Atlas protocol in inquiry meetings and upload the agendas and minutes in Google Docs, which is accessible to all school staff. Teachers reported that the professional collaborations have led to student achievement as evidenced by Regents results. For example, the 2015 Algebra Regents passing rate has increased by 11% over the 2014 Algebra Regents. Teachers also stated that weekly team meetings have led to school-wide instructional initiatives, such as teachers across grades and subject areas using the instructional strategy of RAFT.
- During an observed inquiry team, teachers used an Atlas protocol to exam the MoSL Living Environment assessments. Teachers reviewed student work from the students selected for inquiry work and used the MoSL rubric to evaluate students' responses. Discussing trends and patterns as well as instructional strategies used in previous lessons, teachers determined that in forthcoming lessons they would focus on supporting claims because they saw minimal improvement from the baseline to the midyear assessments in this area. Also, teachers discussed how they would continue using their school-wide RAFT strategy in upcoming lessons.
- Teacher leaders have opportunities to meet with each other to discuss and ensure instructional coherence across the school. The inquiry teacher leaders meet once a week before they meet with their inquiry team and the grade teacher leaders follow the same pattern. A review of teacher leader agendas and minutes revealed that they discuss student work, data, coherency of instructional strategies, and best practices.
- Teacher leaders shared that they play a vital role in instructional initiatives, such as the teacher-created instructional strategies of PACE, RAFT and IAAS Maps that are being used across the school. School leaders reported that they always confer with teachers in making any instructional decisions because they want teachers to have input and ownership. Teachers reported that their voice is a major part of the school and their instructional ideas are valued. One teacher said, "We are always discussing new ways to support our students with our instructional focus amongst ourselves and with administration". A second teacher said, "Administration trusts us in our instructional-decision making."