



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

York Early College Academy

Middle-High School Q284

**108-35 167 Street
Queens
NY 11433**

Principal: Deborah Burnett

**Date of review: January 21, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Matthew Angell**

The School Context

York Early College Academy is a high school with 612 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 54% Black, 9% Hispanic, 1% White, 27% Asian, 5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently and effectively communicate high expectations to all constituencies and provide training to staff and on-going feedback to families connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

Clear expectations in explicit written communications and in frequent verbal reminders reinforce goals so that staff members hold themselves mutually accountable for student progress and successfully partner with families toward meeting those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders set high expectations in written and verbal communication to students, teachers, and families. All groups interviewed discussed learning about the schools' expectations towards college and career from the moment they entered the school. School leaders embed all communications, including staff and community newsletters, with a college and career readiness focus. Monthly newsletters go home to parents that not only include relevant parent teacher association meetings and school leadership meetings, but also school run workshops connected to Common Core Learning Standards and college readiness.
- Faculty and school leaders meet regularly with students and families to review progress towards college and career goals. Once a year students and families meet with guidance counselors to discuss course progress and options in the upcoming year. In 11th grade the principal, assistant principal, and guidance counselor meet with families on a Saturday to review students' entire portfolios and options for college. Parents who have been through the process said it was very helpful to them in understanding the possibilities for their children.
- The school's instructional focus on discussion and assessment in the classroom, as it aligns to Danielson's Framework for Teaching, is reinforced through professional development and professional collaboration. Teachers reported, and were corroborated by school leaders, that a lot of trust was placed in them to create and revise Common Core curriculum aligned to the school vision. Through Atlas Rubicon and Google documents teachers collaboratively revise and improve curriculum maps while they are provided ongoing support through professional development sessions.
- Parents are provided workshops on articulation, transition, and common core learning standards presented by school leaders and teachers. One workshop for example, presented by 9th grade teachers, was on transitioning from middle school to high school.
- All teachers use Engrade to inform and communicate with parents regarding student progress. Parents reported that this new system has allowed them to understand exactly what their child needed to do and allowed them to be more involved in their child's schoolwork. One parent shared her experience stating that Engrade allowed her to communicate more frequently with her son's teachers and improve his progress.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms teachers use curricula aligned assessments and rubrics. Teachers consistently use checks for understanding and self-assessment across classrooms.

Impact

Although students are provided actionable feedback on assignments, the school does not yet use assessment to develop a shared understanding of student mastery, thus diminishing the meaningfulness of feedback for both teachers and students regarding achievement. Similarly, while current classroom level assessment and checks for understanding inform effective instructional adjustments, they are not sufficiently fine-tuned and thus students are not always able to state their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers ask clarifying questions of students and in some instances make adjustments based on students' responses. For instance, in one Geometry class the teacher noticed a misunderstanding around comprehension of hypotenuse and obtuse triangles and consequently addressed it with students before moving forward with the lesson. She then changed her exit slip question so that it covered only the parts of the lesson covered.
- Teachers and teacher teams create rubric-based assessments for their units. Students receive rubric-based feedback on their work, but in speaking with students, they were not always aware of their own next steps. Students did speak about using rubrics in their classrooms, but were not able to state what specifically they needed to improve. Most students mentioned goals such as improving report card averages, but were not able to state how they could achieve that goal.
- Ongoing school-level data from common assessments does not filter through teacher teams up to school leaders, however teams, do make adjustments based on their analysis. For example, the English language arts team found that students had issues with counter claim on their school created baseline writing assessment, and so they shared best practices and revised their units, across grades, to improve student proficiency in counter claim.
- The English Language Arts team spoke about the creation of vertically aligned rubrics for their unit assessments and discussed using the results to modify units and instruction. For example, in the team meeting observed, teachers used a protocol to unpack state standards across grades to identify possible gaps for students for an upcoming unit based on student data they had collected and the upcoming unit's assessment rubric. The data and discussion is primarily at the team level is not yet analyzed across teams and over time.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills are emphasized in the curricula and academic tasks that are embedded in a coherent way.

Impact

Careful alignment of curricula and strategic integration of instructional shifts in a continuum across grade levels engages all students in rigorous learning tasks enabling all students to graduate high school with college credits.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Atlas Rubicon online software to create, revise, and monitor curriculum maps for all subjects. The software allows the school to look at the progression of units over time and analyze content and standards covered. All unit maps conform to a unified template that includes standards or performance indicators, essential questions, content, skills, key vocabulary, formative assessment, summative assessment, and differentiated supports.
- The curricula are designed so that students can earn as many as 60 transferable, college credits before graduation. All students in middle school, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities take accelerated courses. For instance, course sequence and scheduling are strategically aligned so that all students can take Common Core Algebra in 7th grade.
- Writing, problem solving, and critical thinking are embedded throughout the curriculum. For example, in 8th grade science, students wrote explanatory essays examining the change in classification of planets within the solar system in which they had to cite textual evidence from multiple sources. Students were graded against and received feedback on a rubric that incorporated both science content components and English language arts standards. Lesson plans across content areas consistently emphasize higher order thinking skills such as real world application, analyzing information from multiple sources, and citing evidence. In one Earth Science classroom student groups worked together to analyze recent scientific research on important geological events in the Earth's past. Groups had to identify the each author's scientific methods, analyze the validity to the author's hypothesis, and synthesize a response using multiple research articles.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices are aligned to curricula and school beliefs in providing students with multiple scaffolds and opportunities to work collaboratively. Students are consistently provided multiple entry points into lessons.

Impact

Articulated belief in multiple scaffolds and students working collaboratively provide all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, access so that they engage in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers plan with a Universal Agenda that promotes coherence between classrooms and aligns to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The agenda includes an aligned aim, clear objectives, and exit questions/task. Teachers' lesson plans and instruction focuses on higher-order thinking questions, opportunities for discussion, and assessment all of which align with school's focus and the school's beliefs. For example, in a pre-calculus class the teacher was incorporating flipped classroom techniques into her classroom by which students studied a video, with PowerPoint, at home the night before. During class, students were able to practice on scaffolded questions with group members, during which students had to explain their reasoning to their group members and use appropriate academic vocabulary to support their answers and demonstrate their understanding.
- Across classrooms, teachers provided supports to students including lesson specific, teacher-created graphic organizers, vocabulary support, and varied texts. For instance, in an 8th grade classroom, students were asked to compare a scene in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* with the same scene in the film version. Students gathered evidence using a teacher-created graphic organizer, engaged in group discussion, answered scaffolded questions, and wrote a response citing evidence. Students were supported in their writing with a rubric as well as a laminated list of transitional words and phrases.
- Across classrooms students were engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. For instance, in one 6th grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) science classroom, students were engaged in a multi-station, multi-day investigation on waves. Students moved between stations, working in rotating groups to conduct investigations on different types of waves. Both teachers rotated among the stations asking questions, assessing student understanding, and memorializing in conference notes.

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work. The school has a defined distributive leadership structure.

Impact

On-going careful analysis has given teachers valuable data that has improved teacher practice resulting in progress towards goals for groups of students. Well-established structures encourage distributive leadership such that teachers make critical decisions that affect learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- All professional learning community teams (PLCs) create an ongoing action plan that is submitted, updated, and monitored through Google Docs. The action plans include SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals, meeting agendas, and team progress. School leaders regularly attend team meetings and give feedback both on the written plan and the meeting observed. For instance, the vertical math team has been analyzing student proficiency in operations and fractions using performance tasks and school leaders have guided the team focus around looking at specific strategies and their impact on student learning. This has led the team to conduct intervisitations to collect information on how they are teaching particular standards.
- Teachers were observed within their regular cycle of curriculum refinement analyzing changes in English language arts standards from grades six through 12 and discussing the impact on an upcoming unit of study. Teachers spoke to using this process to strategically identify key standards, create aligned assessments, and eventually norm grading of student work. Teachers stated their work together was building a common language among students from year-to-year as staff became more consistent in their expectations and practices. Students across grades and subject areas used the term “evidence” consistently in explaining their reasoning, frequently citing specific textual evidence to support their opinions and claims.
- Team leaders conduct needs assessments for their teams at the beginning of each school year. This needs assessment informs school leaders in planning for professional development as well as in setting goals to address identified school-wide needs. For instance, team leaders identified a need for greater school-parent engagement, and communicated to school leaders that the school needed a parent engagement plan to more effectively partner with families and a committee was created.