



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Corona Arts and Sciences Academy

Intermediate School Q311

**45-10 94 Street
Queens
NY 11373**

Principal: Beth Hert

**Date of review: March 20, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Shirley Wheeler-Massey**

The School Context

Corona Arts and Sciences Academy is a middle school with 207 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 1% Black, 95% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.4%.

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	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	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	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	Focus	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to all staff through ongoing feedback and professional learning support. School staff has established a culture for learning through high expectations that are consistently communicated to all students.

Impact

Transparent communication followed by teacher support has resulted in a system of accountability for all staff. Continuous feedback and guidance to students successfully prepares them for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- During the summer months, school leaders provide a two week long orientation for new staff to outline the school's expectations around school culture, their core values, as well as instructional practices, which are collaboratively facilitated by administrators and staff. Teachers are also engaged in a book study, aligned to the school's instructional focus around Danielson's Framework for Teaching component 3B-Questioning and Discussion techniques. This practice provides teachers the opportunity to work in partnerships to synthesize a chapter from the book and present a strategy to the staff, followed by focused inter-visitations to observe the practice, with time for reflection and feedback to the teachers visited on that strategy. Furthermore, the staff is provided with the *CASA Courier*, a monthly newsletter from the principal that provides resources and articles related to the school's instructional focus, as well as instructional tips to support teacher practice.
- Feedback from administrators is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and speaks to teacher's strengths, with clear next steps that outline what the teacher needs to do to improve their practice. Weekly professional learning, facilitated by school staff, is provided based on specific needs identified from classroom observations, along with those that are designed to address their focus for the year. During these professional learning sessions, teachers are responsible for rotating the responsibility of facilitating discussions that address gaps in practice across the school and work collaboratively to develop strategies that will support pedagogical improvements and student learning.
- Teachers and staff are providing students with clear feedback and next steps to ensure they understand what they need to do to improve. Students are also supported by the guidance counselor, who reinforces the efforts of ensuring students get the direct services needed to improve their learning outcomes. The guidance counselor shared that her role is to be proactive and not reactive to ensure students receive the services needed to be successful and prepared for their next level of learning. Students expressed that they appreciate the feedback teachers are providing them and that they are allowed to set goals, alongside their teachers, which has helped them improve in areas they were having difficulties. Additionally, the principal recently met with all students at the mid-point of the school year to provide individual data reports that detail performance levels from state assessments, as well as attendance percentiles. Students were asked to reflect on their noticings and set goals, which initiated the process of having students become aware and take ownership of their learning, with many still at the beginning stages of fully understanding the goals set with and by their teachers.

Area of Focus

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

Teacher teams are inconsistently engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations to analyze student work for students on whom they are focused.

Impact

Teacher collaboration and inquiry work is beginning to impact teacher practice and student learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet twice per week to engage in grade and vertical common planning to refine their lessons and to share strategies that support student learning. At the start of the school year, teacher teams utilized the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) exam Item Skills Analysis to pinpoint the standards that each grade would focus on, as well as assessment data from Edperformance and Achieve3000 to make adjustments to their curriculum and instructional practices. However, this level of inquiry and analysis of assessment data and is not happening on an ongoing basis. Teacher team accountability forms reflect teachers primarily meeting to “look at instruction”, with limited opportunities to look at student work or assessment data. This year, teachers have yet to look at student writing to identify patterns or trends in order to identify teaching strategies that would support their writing skills.
- During an observed 6th and 7th grade meeting, teachers met to review their understanding of multiple entry points and reviewed different lesson plans to identify evidence of those practices. In small groups and partnerships, teachers modified the plans to include additional opportunities for multiple points of entry, such as sentence starters and varied levels of questions and word banks, in an effort to support the diverse learners within their classrooms. While the teachers shared a variety of strategies focused on providing multiple entry points during instruction, teachers did not reference any assessment data or analyze any student work to inform their adjustments to lesson plans or curricular documents. Furthermore, teachers did not discuss specific students and how they were progressing towards the school’s instructional focus on improving “student ownership of content-area discourse”.
- While teacher collaboration is present across the school through teams such as the hiring committee, the instructional cabinet and the School Intervention Team (SIT), teachers are in the beginning stages of engaging in inquiry work on the grade and school level, to improve student learning outcomes. Although the school identified a teacher who analyzed and tracked student performance from two of the school’s common assessments in January, the school has yet to fully transfer this inquiry work to its teacher teams. Teachers welcome the opportunities to collaborate across grades and to share best practices with their colleagues, and are in the process of deepening their work aligned to the school’s goals in order to improve student learning and discussions across the school, as well as their practice.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across content areas and grades, teachers ensure alignment of curricula and rigorous tasks to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrating the instructional shifts.

Impact

Collaborative design of curricula and challenging tasks has built coherence across the school and consistently promotes college and career readiness skills.

Supporting Evidence

- At the inception of the school over a year ago, school leaders and teachers collaboratively created curricula across the content areas that align to the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. For English language arts (ELA), teachers have designed their own curriculum using components from the *Wheatley Portfolio* from the site EngageNY. For math, teachers are using the Go Math program along with other resources from Carnegie Learning and EngageNY. Within each content area, teachers are providing opportunities for students to be exposed to a balance of fiction and non-fiction leveled text, to cite evidence from text to support a claim, to use academic vocabulary in written and verbal responses and to increase fluency skills in reading and math, as well as to develop a deep understanding of math content using multiple strategies to solve problems. The school has also aligned its social studies units to the New York City scope and sequence with the inclusion of informational writing, and using a combination of resources for science instruction, such as Glencoe Integrated Science and online resources from BrainPop.
- Within a grade 6 ELA curriculum map, one of the units of study focuses on culture and identity. Students read vignettes from the story *"A House on Mango Street"*, a non-fiction story, *"How a Teenager Reflects on Cultural Pride"* and other poems and short stories aligned to the unit theme. Additionally, within a 7th grade math unit on expressions and equations, students are responsible for applying their understanding of the content to evaluate and solve algebraic expressions, as well as explain in written form, their strategies to solve multi-step real world math problems, using the skills and tools learned within the unit. Science units reflect the infusion of the shifts by having students analyze the layers of the Earth by using visual and textual information and synthesizing information from multimedia sources for research-based lab reports.
- Across grades and content areas, curriculum maps, unit plans and teacher's daily lesson plans, include learning objectives, essential questions, big understandings, a focus on academic vocabulary, various tasks that meet the needs of all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, along with various forms of assessments. Within a 6th grade science unit, all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities are responsible for completing a group project that includes the creation and development of a simple machine that demonstrates how energy changes forms to make work easier. In social studies, all 7th graders will engage in historical research where they identify, select and evaluate evidence from diverse sources, such as works of art, photographs, artifacts and primary and secondary sources to explain their understanding of the complexity of Native American cultures.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school approaches teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is aligned to the curricula and informed by the instructional shifts and the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

School-wide engagement and accountable discussions result in meaningful work products and students beginning to take ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In review of observation data from last year and collaborative discussions with members of the instructional cabinet, the school decided to focus on Danielson component 3B- Questioning and Discussion techniques to increase student discussions and content-area discourse across classrooms. During visits to classrooms, there was evidence of a shared belief of how students learn best through the use of the workshop model, where teachers provided a mini-lesson to frontload information, followed by having students work in small groups or partnerships to collaboratively work through tasks, followed by opportunities to discuss and share their understanding and thinking aloud with their peers. For example, during a 6th grade science lesson, students were learning about the different types of levers through teacher discussion and with an informative video and were asked to turn and talk within their small groups to discuss the similarities and differences of the four types of levers. Students also completed a task that required them to identify real-world examples aligned to the levers presented. During class discussions, students utilized school-wide discussion protocols, such as the round robin and popcorn protocols, using accountable talk prompts, “I agree/disagree”..., “I would like to add on”..., which have been promoted across this school this year.
- Teachers across the school are promoting higher-order thinking skills by having students analyze problems, interpret information and make claims. Students in a 7th grade ELA classroom were charged with being the “investigators” to examine a picture of a crime scene in order to make a judgment about the character’s actions through interpretation of the evidence. Students first worked independently to analyze the illustration and then shared their findings within small groups. The teacher and students were observed asking each other for further clarification around their thinking of their claims and were provided opportunities to share their ideas and claims with the whole class. Similarly, in a 6th grade math class, students circulated the classroom to work within small groups on various math stations to solve multi-step problems. Students engaged in “mathematical discourse” using academic language to share their strategies in solving problems and were observed asking their group mates to explain how they used a particular strategy to answer the problems.
- With a focus on increasing student discussion and discourse across the school, teachers are encouraging students to share their ideas verbally and pushing them to think critically throughout lessons. Some teachers have also attempted to have students take ownership of the discussions through strategies such as “pass the ball” or having students select a peer to elaborate on the ideas of another. For instance, in another math class, students were at the SMARTboard explaining their solutions to problems and another student, without teacher prompting, asked him to explain why he used that strategy.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers and students are using assessments and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula to determine next steps for improvement.

Impact

As a result of teacher feedback, students are able to reflect on their work and collaboratively set goals that allow teachers to make the necessary instructional adjustments that meet their learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, teachers are utilizing performance tasks, department pre-and post-assessments aligned to their units of study, Edperformance, Achieve 3000, Max Scholar, and Mind-Play to determine student progress. Teachers are using this data as they confer with students to have them complete goal sheets that outline where students are and their next steps for improvement. After unit exams, students and teachers reflect on their progress by using the school-created conference sheet which includes pre-and post-assessment reflections, specific data, next steps and SMART goals, which are collaboratively determined with the teacher, to inform their next instructional moves. Along with student writing and performance task, standards-aligned rubrics are used as a means to set clear goals and to provide guidelines for students' performance.
- A review of student work products on classroom and hallway bulletin boards, as well as in student portfolios, revealed that teacher feedback to students is clear, specific and aligned to the task rubric. Feedback highlights what the student did well and future steps to advance their work. For example, one teacher shared with a student, "your position in your writing is clear, but you did not provide enough evidence to support your argument". The teacher then followed up by detailing what the student needed to do to improve his writing tasks. Likewise, during class visits, as teachers circulated to students as they worked in groups or independently, they were provided with specific feedback such as "I like how you used that strategy to try and solve that problem. However, there is another way that will help you get the correct solution". The teacher then modeled on the chart paper to show the student and his peers how to accurately approach the math problem. The students were then able to use the teachers' model to solve similar problems that required them to utilize the strategies and approaches provided by the teacher during their small group work.
- During class visits, most teachers were observed checking for understanding in various ways such as questioning, circulating to small groups to confer, using iPADS to memorialize student learning, thumbs up/thumbs down, group share-outs, or having students present their work and understanding at the whiteboard. Students also reflect on their work through peer and self-assessment reflection forms, which help determine the goals that are set, in conjunction with unit assessment data. In a 7th grade ELA classroom, the teacher circulated to students as they worked on varying levels of the same task, asking them follow-up questions, while jotting notes on her iPad to determine whether students were able to use evidence to defend their conclusions, which previous lesson data determined that students were experiencing challenges with this skill. In a 6th grade Integrated-Co-Teaching classroom, one teacher provided the mini-lesson to the whole group, while the other teacher circulated to the differentiated small groups to take notes on their understanding of the content in order to determine the next day's small groups and various tasks .