



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Benjamin Franklin High School for Finance &  
Information Technology**

**High School Q313**

**207-01 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11411**

**Principal: Dr. Carla Theodorou**

**Date of review: January 14, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Donald Conyers**

## The School Context

Benjamin Franklin High School for Finance and Information Technology is a high school with 114 students in grade 9. The school population comprises 71% Black, 12% Hispanic, 2% White, and 12% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 is not available due to new school status.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
---------------------------	---	----------------	-----------------------

### Findings

In this brand new school, the entire teaching staff is seriously involved in structured professional collaborations using the inquiry approach, data and the Common Core Learning Standards. There are distributive leadership structures embedded throughout the school.

### Impact

As a result of the tightly structured teamwork, teachers confidently make informed decisions that facilitate improved teacher practice, coherence across classrooms and student improvement.

### Supporting Evidence

- The 9<sup>th</sup> grade team developed a problem of practice protocol to guide their meetings. The protocol allows for the presentation of a problem and the opportunity for the teachers to receive feedback and possible solutions. For example, the social studies department reported that students were having difficulty organizing their thoughts and responding to open-ended questions. Consequently, the team, in consultation with the principal, began to develop a uniform writing rubric to support the teaching of writing and gauging the caliber of responses. Additionally, in order to improve student engagement in lessons and more adherence to classroom rules, the teacher team, after studying the integrated collaborative team teaching classes, determined that all teachers needed to consistently break down all tasks into smaller steps and ensure that they assign time limits across various stages of the lesson development to support student engagement and learning
- As part of the school-wide initiative to implement common writing practices across the different content areas, all teachers look at student work weekly to understand improvement of student argumentative writing and citing textual evidence. They examine selected students' writing over time as students use the school-adopted Schaffer model for writing. Together they look at the writing samples and decide on next steps for students who have not shown improvement.
- In an effort to fully understand student learning issues, team members voluntarily enter other teachers' classrooms to observe students in the midst of a lesson to gather data about student engagement, challenges, lesson presentation and student self-help methods. All gathered data informs decisions and improvement efforts on the part of the team. For example, the Global Studies teacher observed his students in the Earth Science class. He saw students that did not actively participate during social studies engaged in science class. His observations led to a change in practice. He began to provide more student-centered activities through a jig saw method; increased group activity, assigned roles and began to facilitate lessons more, while decreasing teacher voice during lessons
- As a new school, each teacher has agreed to take on additional leadership roles to prepare the school for expansion and accelerated improvement. Teachers lead initiatives that support the principal's vision, including development and refinement of social-emotional learning, development of a community service model, growing external partnership possibilities, building a professional community, increasing parent engagement, mentoring, and building an overall assessment portal to fortify school-wide analysis and planning.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

The school's assessment practices consistently inform teachers and students of progress toward goals and opportunities to deepen learning and content understanding. Classroom assessment practices include ongoing checks for understanding and some student self-monitoring of learning.

### Impact

Teachers use findings from common assessments to modify the pacing of lessons and selection of instructional strategies to ensure that students continue to make adjustments in their learning patterns; however, teacher decisions do not yet ensure that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery and not all students are aware of their next learning steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school began its planning in May and June before its opening and planned its curricula based on student data. They created units of study for all subjects and held summer induction classes for students. The school's planned math curriculum proved to be too difficult for the incoming students. It was noted that students assigned to algebra were having difficulty with the basic use of fractions. Math teachers, once this was discovered, adjusted the content presentation for the fall to include teaching strategies and content needed to advance student learning.
- The school focused on argumentative writing and quickly discovered that students had difficulty with forming and developing their arguments. Teacher team efforts and research led to the school-wide adoption of the Schaffer model in October for writing. Students in English and social studies began to confidently use the model to improve their writing. Bulletin boards in the corridors and in classrooms display written work that follows the well-known and predictable pattern offer in the Schaffer model
- Teachers and most students use rubrics, Pupil Path, the school-wide grading policy, and exit tickets to ensure that students understand lesson content and targeted skills. Some of the students have become proficient with meta-cognitive practice; many students know when they experience difficulty in learning, however many have not yet demonstrated awareness of how to take the next learning steps.
- The school implements a cycle of assessment opportunities to ensure that they continue to understand student progress. A student stated, "The formative assessments given provide meaningful information to me." The assessment array includes quizzes, student oral presentations, written student reflections, midterms and final examinations. While many students are aware of their learning challenges and can offer some solution steps, many of the students with disabilities have not been able to create solutions found within their assignments.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

School leaders and teachers develop and align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and use academic vocabulary, writing and real life application.

### Impact

Teacher planning builds coherence across the grade, promotes engaging and rigorous academic tasks, and supports college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school presents a “Problem of the Week” in each subject area to challenge students with real situations that assess skill and content understanding. For example, in math students worked in pairs to solve examples within the unit of linear and non-linear functions. While using the Schaffer, model students wrote two paragraphs detailing the group’s solution, how the answers were determined and how the problem could have been improved. In science, the students organized details and facts to support the theory of continental drift. All presentations included written, spoken and visual modalities.
- The school offers two English classes daily to students to ensure that they receive the necessary skills and to balance nonfiction and fiction text in order to support the curricula and student interest. In the grade 9 class the students were reading about *The Salem Witch Trials* and an article about Trayvon Martin, which led them to write persuasive essays through the lens of a historian speaking about whether the historic decisions were just or not. In the second English class of the day, students read several nonfiction articles on careers, job qualifications, economic systems and hiring trends, in order to build awareness and focus on a career path that will eventually lead to research projects in future units of study.
- The teacher team uses backward planning to ensure that lessons in the core subjects consistently highlight essential skills and appropriate Common Core Learning Standards while still planning for what students need to know to advance toward college level readiness. Accordingly, all unit plans observed highlighted what students need to demonstrate successfully by the end of the unit or the semester, lesson objectives, learning and content standards, an essential question, goals for all students, goal extensions for advanced learning, as well as adapted and modified pathways for students needing more support and vocabulary.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

Teachers across classrooms facilitate student experiences that include meaningful writing assignments, discussions, group work and application of real life scenarios connected to class content.

### Impact

Teachers work actively to meet the requirements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school's shared belief that ongoing support of social emotional learning promotes students' best learning. Students demonstrate their thinking in lessons through assigned academic tasks and student discussion.

### Supporting Evidence

- Grade 9 Earth Science students worked in groups to answer the question, "What is permeability?" These science students worked across five different activity stations examining sand, topsoil, medium pebbles, small pebbles and mixed items within timed intervals. They created predictions, explanations, and interpreted data to determine factors affecting permeability.
- In the business communications class students researched different career pathways and gathered information about college qualifications for a selected career, the importance of the career, college courses of study, workforce demand and professional career ladder options related the chosen career path. The students then wrote a two-page paper detailing the significant information uncovered during their research. During the lesson the students engaged in peer editing while using a rubric.
- Students reading *The Necklace* took a look at the actions surrounding the protagonist's decision to borrow a necklace to understand how cause and effect contributed to the development of the plot. They were asked to explain details and articulate an overall understanding of the narrative structure of the story. As students worked with partners, they were asked to begin their conversation with "this shows that..." Over the course of the lesson student responsibility included students writing independently, reflecting on the story, making predictions followed by peer interaction and discussion. Finally each student produced his own written response including a summary.
- All teachers intentionally make connections within their lessons that highlight aspects of social emotional learning. In English class where they read *The Necklace*, the students extended the notion about the value of working to repay a debt and the value of honesty. In Business Finance, the students discussed the implications of extended credit and realizing life goals.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

The principal consistently communicates and evaluates the high expectations articulated to the entire staff regarding improved teacher and student performance. Teachers create a culture for student learning that reinforces those high expectations articulated by the principal.

### Impact

Students and teachers respond positively to established systems put in place to promote improvement along the excellence continuum.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal uses her partnership with Queens College and the National Academy Foundation to inform the school's high expectations and make sure they align with industry and college-entry expectations. She consciously provides supports for student writing, courses to address business and business communications and financial management where students develop resumes, learn about credit cards, financial implications and debt, and business plans, all of which were informed by her findings about college and career readiness.
- As teachers develop curricula and are observed by the principal, they have conversations and create action plans for student and teacher improvement. As a part of the school fabric, teacher peer competition seems to drive teacher eagerness and ongoing introspection that is met with the professional assistance from the principal. For example, a social studies teacher noticed during peer observation how students that were not engaged and motivated were actively engaged in the Earth Science class. The social studies teacher approached the principal with the concern. The principal use school funds to secure an instructional coach and set up external visits to other known strong schools for the teacher.
- The teacher team focuses on emotional learning in addition to student achievement. Students receive ongoing feedback through advisory, teacher check ins, and the guidance counselors in this small school, including the principal. Students meet with adults about grade 9 requirements as well as high school graduation requirements. Students are also afforded the opportunity to address academic needs and student emotional health through academic support classes and mentoring.
- The principal holds one to one meetings with all staff to provide feedback about progress and to fine tune goals and action plans. The principal continually praises teachers while raising the bar for continued excellence. One example that the teachers reported deals with students in their junior year having meaningful internships. The principal encourages teachers to begin the planning and fostering of relationships now- while the students are in their freshman year.
- The principal consults with Queens College to understand the college level coursework and present the curricula to her staff so that the expectation for student work in high school will be in better alignment with college expectation. Students feel like grownups and look forward to challenging work that will prepare them for college.