Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Creative Arts Academy

Middle School X145

1000 Teller Avenue
Bronx
NY10456

Principal: Lauren Wilkins

Date of review: February 10, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Cheryl McClendon

The School Context

The Creative Arts Academy is a middle school with 369 students from grade 5 through grade 8. The school population comprises 29 % Black, 70 % Hispanic, 1% White, 1 % White and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 36% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88.8%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing

Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to the faculty and are developing a system of accountability and training for these expectations. The school is developing a system to communicate academic expectations and provide support for families.

Impact

The developing accountability and training systems are enhancing supports for teachers in meeting expectations. Developing communication structures are fortifying support for families.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal administered a survey at the beginning of the school year to gauge the professional development needs of teachers, and stated teachers are held more accountable for their own professional learning through this process. After each professional development session, teachers are required to fill out a reflection sheet indicating what new strategies they have learned as well as a plan for immediate implementation of new strategies. All reflection sheets are submitted to school leaders for review and feedback, if necessary.

- Professional development has been conducted in the following areas: strategies to elicit higher-order thinking, looking at student data, providing actionable feedback, developing and using rubrics and checklists, and conferring.

- Parents stated that teachers share their mobile numbers with families to enable home/school communication. In addition, parents shared that they can access some student grades through the Engrade online system. However, the principal stated that although Engrade is available, it is predominantly used by the grade 8 teachers and one grade 7 teacher.

- Parents affirmed that the various after-school programs support families by providing extra-curricular activities, tutoring services and homework supports for students. These programs include The Dreamyard Drama program, the Global Rights community-based organization program, and the Supportive Children's Advocacy Network (SCAN).

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies are inconsistent in providing multiple entry points for student engagement. Student discussions and student work do not consistently demonstrate higher-order thinking.

Impact

Teaching strategies that do not consistently provide access or multiple entry points for the school's diverse learners limit student engagement, and hinder opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- Student-to-student discussion was observed in some classrooms. For example, in a grade 7 class, students worked in dyads to discuss their strategies for multiplying fractions and whole numbers. However, in some classrooms visited, a teacher-centered approach predominated, providing limited opportunity for student-to-student discussion. This was also observed in a science class, where the teacher discussed the focal topic from the front of the room. In this class, the teacher asked intermittent questions and repeatedly called upon the students who were seated in the front of the classroom.

- In one grade 7 math class, the teacher was using Near-pad, a technology-based application that allows teachers to create and download interactive multimedia presentations, and share content and assessments in real-time as they monitor students' entries. As students engaged in a performance-based assessment on their individual I-pads, the teacher was able to see their solutions and group them for instruction immediately. However, strategies to check for understanding to inform grouping for instruction were not prevalent throughout classes that were visited. For example, in one class, the Smart board reflected a graphing inequalities task although the teacher did not circulate throughout the class to strategically support students. Moreover, during this class visit, it was the principal who intervened to introduce to students the effective use of the number line as a tool to solve the inequalities.

- In one special education class, four groups of students focused on identifying primary and secondary sources. As observed, two of the four groups were working collaboratively, while students in the other two groups worked in silence. The teacher and para-professional circulated throughout the classroom but did not offer students strategic support or feedback. Moreover, the teacher proclaimed, "You should all know how to do this. I went over it. I taught the lesson!"

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing

Findings

The school is in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards. Higher-order thinking skills and rigorous habits are inconsistently reflected in academic tasks.

Impact

Due to the fact that curricula are not fully aligned to the standards, academic tasks do not yet consistently reflect higher-order thinking skills and rigorous habits across grades and content areas.

Supporting Evidence

- The school selected Expeditionary Learning curricula as it is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. All English language arts lesson plans contain Common Core "I can" statements, the Common Core standards addressed in the lesson, major skills covered in reading, writing, speaking and listening, modeling or reviewing strategies and group work. Math teachers align components of Go Math, Glencoe Common Core Math and Engage New York, however one math teacher stated during the teacher meeting that, due to the fact that Engage New York is technology-linked, she does not use the program.

- The principal stated that the school is in the process of aligning the social studies and science curriculum. Presently there is no articulated social studies curriculum. However, the principal stated that teachers follow the New York City social studies scope and sequence. Similarly, in science teachers are aligning the science curriculum to the New York State science standards and the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, a living environment lesson plan on reproduction and patterns of development contained the Common Core "I can" statement, the learning target, the New York State science standards, key vocabulary, the do now activity and the mini-lesson.

- The principal stated that due to the fact that the planning of tasks that engage higher order thinking skills is not consistent across all grades and subjects presently, this is a focal instructional area.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings

The school administers common assessments, and teachers are beginning to use assessment data to refine instruction. Across classrooms, teachers' use of checks for understanding is inconsistent.

Impact

As teachers inconsistently use summative and formative assessment data and checks for understanding to tailor instruction to meet students' needs, some student learning needs are not met.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers administer Expeditionary Learning performance-based assessments, and the network achievement coach supports teachers with the analysis of student writing. The school is developing a portfolio system to collect standards-based student writing. Some students brought their English language portfolios to the student meeting and selected a performance-based assessment writing sample to share.

- The school is developing math portfolios with grade-specific performance-based tasks that were selected by math teachers. However, the principal states that currently this system is only being utilized in the 6th grade.

- In some classrooms, teachers were observed checking for student understanding. For example, in a math class, the English as a second language and the math teacher partnered to monitor student understanding and provide strategic support as they worked on graphing coordinates. The English as a second language teacher also provided language support for Spanish dominant students as she circulated the room. Conversely, in an 8th grade English Language Arts class, groups of students discussed their interpretations of figurative quotes that were supplied by the teacher while teacher circulated amongst the groups and listened-in to their discussions.   In this class, check-ins were managerial in nature, as the teacher did not provide guided feedback on the strategic analysis and interpretation of each literary element, although the task required students to analyze and interpret quotes containing metaphors, similes, personification, idioms and/or other forms of figurative language.

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

Findings
Teacher teams are developing the use of an inquiry approach. Distributed leadership structures are developing to include teachers in school wide decision-making.

Impact
Developing distributed leadership structures are facilitating some teacher participation in school wide decision making.

Supporting Evidence
- Each teacher has identified two to three anchor students that he or she is responsible for progress-monitoring in a specific subject area from the beginning of the year through the end of the year. Teachers analyze student work and benchmark assessments for their anchor students, and share their findings during teacher team meetings. At the end of the year, teachers are expected to produce a case study for each of their anchor students. As this is in the emerging stages, there is limited evidence of the impact on strengthened teacher capacity and progress towards goals for groups of students.

- In addition to the formal teacher team meeting periods, teachers meet informally to share data and strategies. During the teacher team meeting, teachers articulated that through participation in cross-curricular conversations they are beginning to develop a more holistic view of each focal student.

- Across the school, teacher leadership roles are beginning to build capacity. For example, a teacher supports colleagues in her role as an English language arts coach two days per week, and another teacher provides math coaching to colleagues one day per week. In addition, the special education liaison acts as a teacher leader, supporting the special education team. Teacher leaders participate in team meetings, and are beginning to support instructional planning and decision-making.