



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Theatre Arts Production Company School

Middle-High School X225

**2225 Webster Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Ron Link

**Date of review: April 29, 2015
Reviewer: Mimi Fortunato**

The School Context

Theatre Arts Production Company School is a middle-high school with 615 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 29% Black, 68% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 33% of the students enrolled and girls account for 67%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90%.

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	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness, and offer teachers training and ongoing feedback. School leaders, teachers and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all learners, and offer guidance/advisement supports to all learners.

Impact

Professional development opportunities for teachers and actionable feedback from school leaders support teachers' progress towards expectations. Coherent guidance and advisement structures ensure that students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to staff through the dissemination of a *TAPCo Teacher Handbook*, and a weekly email distribution of the school-created *Teacher Times* and *Professional Activities*. School leaders conduct frequent cycles of observation and feedback, and most feedback to teachers includes a reference to differentiated resources, support, and time bound next steps. For example, a teacher observation report included the following next steps, "I recommend that you visit the school website to view the multiple resources on questioning and discussion to expand your practice. I also recommend that you visit one of our model teachers, and complete an intervisitation cycle with them. Please advise me via email which new techniques you plan to use by 4/2/15."
- Teachers are engaged in ongoing professional development and collaborations. For example, teachers participate on a number of cross-content grade level and content specific inquiry teams in which teachers assume accountability for establishing next steps and meeting established expectations. Teachers collaborate on the development of *Decision Sheets* which are posted on Google Docs. These *Decision Sheets* outline next steps, and identify those individuals responsible for deliverables.
- All teachers self-assess performance using a needs assessment based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and identify individual professional goals aligned to the school's instructional focus and performance goals. The principal and assistant principals facilitate meetings with teachers to encourage reflection regarding progress towards goals.
- Students shared that they are aware of expectations for academic performance and social behavior, and that teachers and the principal celebrate students' accomplishments and provide students with motivation to meet established expectations. In all classroom visits, student behavior was in compliance with the school's expected norms, and student to students and student to teacher discourse was respectful in tone. Students were observed supporting peers in group and partner discussions, and students stated that they feel safe in classes and supported by the adults in the community. For example, a grade 12 student shared that she has been accepted to New York University and that the college advisor encouraged and supported her through the college search and application process. The school's graduation rate was 76% in 2014, and current data indicates that the school is on target to increase that rate to 84%. In addition, over 90% of graduating students were accepted into colleges in 2014, with scholarships awarded to students totaling over 1.2 million dollars.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are loosely aligned. The school is emerging in its use of common assessments to measure student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Formative assessments and teacher checks for understanding do not always provide a clear portrait of student mastery.

Impact

Inconsistent assessment structures limit actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement, and the results of data analysis are inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction. Teachers' inconsistent use of checks for understanding hinders the development of effective instructional adjustments across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have developed content specific grading policies that incorporate formative and summative assessments such as tests, quizzes, homework, and projects and daily classwork. However, as these grading policies are not consistent across all content areas, and as the formulas contain a number of redundant elements, the information provided to teachers and students does not always provide a clear assessment of mastery of learning standards. For example, each science teacher has developed a grading policy with a different formula, with one teacher's grading policy consisting of labs (30%), exams (30%), classwork (30%), and homework (10%), while another science teacher's policy was comprised of labs (35%), exams (30%), classwork (30%), and homework (5%). In addition, although a percentage of each student's grade is based on classwork in all classes, it was not clear how the most teachers were assessing students' classwork during lessons. Rubrics that clearly stated classwork expectations were not evident, and the majority of teachers were not observed memorializing a classwork grade. Across classrooms, students were not able to articulate how their classwork was assessed. When asked, a student stated, "I might earn a 100% because I have been good." Others shared that they thought they would earn a 20, while another student stated, "The teacher is a weekend grader, so she's behind, and we don't know what our classwork grade would be."
- The instructional team is engaged in the ongoing process of refining assessments and rubrics, and teachers are expected to use the resulting data to identify student learning needs and inform next instructional steps. Most teacher feedback on student work provides actionable next steps to move students from one level to the next, and most feedback is aligned to a task specific rubric. However, across classes, rubrics used to assess student performance varied. In the dance class, the rubric grades were 55, 75, and 100. In an English assignment, the rubric grades were 0 - 4, and in other classes, student work was graded with a rubric that ranged from 0 - 2 or 0 - 3. Although students stated that they have access to Pupil Path on Skedula and can check their grades, few students were able to articulate how their grades on assignments were calculated.
- Across classrooms, there were few examples of student self or peer assessment. Where students were expected to self or peer assess, the process was not always clear to students. For example, in a dance class, students were asked to both self and peer assess the previous day's performance while viewing a video, although many students in the class did not have a pen with which to memorialize their thinking on the rubric, and all students were provided with one copy of the rubric.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts and that curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects and for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

The school's purposeful decisions to build curricular coherence and to ensure a consistent level of rigor promote college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The instructional team has developed curricula across all content areas that promote coherence in the grade 6 through 12 continuum, and in the school's science, technology, arts, engineering, and math (STEAM) focus of interdisciplinary investigation. For example, the principal and eight members of the school staff participated in the Arts & Passion-Driven Learning Institute at Harvard University, where the team piqued the interest of members of Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road to serve as musical consultants on an inter-disciplinary presentation of a student created play geographically set in the continent of Africa.
- The principal has established a key instructional focus of questioning and discussion techniques. To support this goal, the school has selected the Connected Math Program 3 for middle school math instruction, and Code-X for middle school literacy instruction, and has developed high school curricula across all content areas that integrate the instructional shifts of incorporating non-fiction text, writing on demand, and citing textual evidence. Teacher unit and lesson plans provide evidence of planning to support peer to peer discussion and in building all students' skills to engage in rigorous tasks. For example, in a grade 6 English class, the lesson plan noted that students would be partnered as they worked to identify details from a non-fiction text that would support the plan to save the Taj Mahal. To deepen student skill in peer discussions, teacher prepared materials include laminated skill cards that contain sentence starters such as, "In the text it said that...", and, "According to... ."
- Teachers work collaboratively to promote a high level of rigor across classes to ensure that higher-order skills are emphasized across grades and content areas for all learners, including the school's population of English language learners and special education students. For example, an integrated co-teaching English lesson plan on identifying a controlling ideas across multiple texts asked students to develop higher order thinking questions in response to text that had been modified to support students' current reading level. In an integrated co-teaching Global History lesson plan, all students were expected to develop claims and to provide textual evidence for their claims based on their readings in preparation for their participation in a Socratic Seminar.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teacher practice across classrooms are aligned to the curricula and reflect coherence around a set of beliefs regarding how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Coherence around a set of beliefs regarding how students learn best supports consistent student engagement in tasks and peer discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, most lessons in grades 6 through 12 and across content areas followed a consistent model, providing students with an enduring understanding, learning goal, essential question, launch, a group exploration, and a summary, ensuring coherence across grade levels and content areas. Lessons consistently asked students to engage in group practice, and in English and social studies, students were asked to cite textual evidence to support their thinking. In math, students were given opportunities to demonstrate their thinking and justify their answers using real life applications, which is in alignment with the school's belief around how students learn best. For example, in a grade 6 math lesson on calculating the area and perimeter of different shapes, groups of students worked collaboratively, using square inch tiles and chart paper to design a bumper car ride.
- The principal has developed structures to strengthen teacher pedagogy in the use of questioning and discussion techniques to more deeply engage students in their learning and in high-level thinking. The school selected Code X as the middle school literacy curriculum as it engages students in rich and rigorous conversations which are dependent on complex non-fiction and fiction text. Teachers regularly invite colleagues to visit their classrooms to observe questioning and discussion strategies such as: ask the expert, relay questioning, accountable talk, think-pair-share, and small group student discussions. Teachers shared that the school's instructional focus on questioning and discussion and the professional sharing of best practice has deepened school-wide coherence in the implementation of effective strategies to engage students in sharing their thinking with peers.
- In most classrooms visited, students were provided with opportunities to engage in peer-peer discussion. In a grade 7 math class lesson on probability, students took turns throwing cubes and constructing a table to illustrate which partner had the greatest probability of winning. In this class, the teacher directed student pairs to turn and talk in response to a list of student generated questions. In two classes observed, students were engaged in Socratic Seminars, and in a Global History class where students were engaged in a Socratic Seminar on the impact of geography, Islam, and migration on Africa, students were observed citing textual evidence to support their claims from primary sources such as *Africa in the Days of Exploration* by Al-Bakri.

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

The majority of teachers engage in content area professional collaborations that promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. A distributive leadership structure is in place.

Impact

Teacher professional collaborations support the alignment of practice to the school's instructional goals. Teachers have built leadership capacity, and have a voice in key decisions regarding student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Content, grade level, and cross content and cross grade level teacher teams meet weekly in structured collaborations. For example, the special education team was observed analyzing student written work, and sharing the strategies that teachers might use to guide next instructional steps. Members of this team were able to clearly articulate the outcomes of their work on shared teacher practice and on student outcomes.
- A review of agendas and minutes provide evidence that teachers meet once each week in content and grade teams. Agendas and minutes indicate that teachers consistently engage in an inquiry approach in which they collaboratively analyze outcomes for student groups to inform next shared instructional steps. Teachers gather and archive assessment data, and the analysis of the data informs next instructional steps, strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. For example, a special education teacher shared that the questioning and discussion strategies have strengthened her understanding of how to engage students more deeply in peer to peer discourse and in citing textual evidence. ADVANCE data demonstrates growth in teacher practice across the Danielson Framework for Teaching domains and competencies. For example, as of April, 2015, 80% of teachers were rated effective in questioning and assessment, a 14% increase over the rate of 66% of teachers who were rated effective through April, 2014.
- Teacher leaders facilitate content and grade level meetings, and teachers assume a leadership role in supporting colleagues. For example, teachers shared that the teacher leaders provide feedback to the principal on professional development planning, and the school participates in the New York City DOE model teacher program, with two teachers, (one science and one English), assuming the role of model teacher.
- Teachers stated that they have a voice in key instructional decisions and stated that their perceptions and findings are taken into consideration. For example, following an analysis of the January Algebra Regent exams, the math team identified an instructional focus of discreet trigonometry skills and implemented additional time on task that resulted in increased student performance (from 27% to 67% and 9% to 84% correct) on benchmark assessments on those skills targeted.