



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy

Elementary X236

**1871 Walton Avenue
Bronx
NY 10453**

Principal: Beverly Ellis

**Date of review: January 22, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Roxan Marks**

The School Context

Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy is an elementary school with 377 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 29% Black, 69% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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	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	Focus	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	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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders communicate well-defined expectations to the entire staff who participates in professional development activities aligned with Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders and staff effectively partner with families to communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations is shared by all staff that ensures that families and students understand student progress towards those expectations and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are continually messaged to staff and school leaders who have a process to monitor student progress and hold teachers accountable for learning outcomes and progress of the students in their classes. Teachers must support their instructional decision with data and student work. The vertical team continually reviews student work against the Common Core Learning Standards across all grades. The staff handbook outlines administrative and instructional expectations for lesson plans, grading, technology and data reporting. Bulletin boards display high quality work including projects that celebrate learning.
- The school calendar shares vital information on learning opportunities to assist parents in supporting students with literacy development, middle school process, addressing behaviors that negatively impact student learning, advocacy, Common Core Standards and other topics. A teacher-created newsletter captures key aspects of learning that is shared with families including prompts for parents to support reading comprehension, nutrition, community building and other useful information for parents. A technology plan outlines expectations for multi-media use by students and staff. Teachers create class newsletters that inform parents of strategies to support learning at home as well as other information including nutrition, upcoming assessments and workshops. During the parent meeting, they shared that these documents are helpful and keep them connected to their child's learning. Parents indicated that children articulate their goals to them and even share their next steps needed to improve learning. Parents stated that teachers and school leaders are partners with them in educating their children and the school is their second home.
- Teacher teams and administrators worked together to create clear criteria for exiting each grade and listing the skills required for mastery and fluency. These documents also include exposure items that students should know for the next level. These grade level expectations were created for English language arts and mathematics, shared with families who reported their usefulness and many of the parents use these documents to track their child's progress towards grade level expectations. The vertical team also ensures continuity and coherence by continuously exchanging information about student learning, strategies and assessment analysis results that inform decisions and these grade level criteria at the school level.
- Professional development is aligned to Danielson and the committee comprised of various constituents coordinates learning opportunities for staff that strengthen pedagogy and ensure meaningful learning activities for students. In conjunction with external, contracted partners, teachers participate in cohort groups based on focus areas from the previous Quality Review. Topics for groups include: response to intervention; analyzing student assessment; work to differentiate instruction; developing challenging and engaging tasks. Groups were provided with a framework document to support the development of norms for the professional learning committees, a template for teams to use to document the work, questions that team members should keep in mind and clear expectations for the process.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices are aligned to the Danielson Framework and core beliefs are reflected in all classrooms. Student work and discussion demonstrated high level of participation and thinking.

Impact

In most classrooms instructional strategies and lessons provide scaffolds and entry points for learners; however, student ownership of their learning and high quality extensions are not yet embedded across all classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade 5 lesson, students were engaged in Socratic Seminar using the text Liars Don't Qualify to understand the conflict, theme and purpose while providing opportunities for discussion, questioning and making connections to deepen their understanding of the text. Discussion focused on the essential question, "What are the ways power is exerted and institutionalized?" Students were seated in two circles with small notebooks and using accountable talk stems as they engaged in discourse. Students supported each other and most participated in dialogue. Students used evidence from text to support their claims and they were highly engaged in a lively discussion; however, this high level of student participation and discourse was not evident in most classrooms.
- The majority of classrooms visited demonstrated evidence of the school-wide beliefs about students learning resulting in coherence in room environments. Staff believes that students learn best when working in small groups, participating in conferences with teachers, working with peers and partaking in learning center activities. In most of the classrooms visited, students were organized in groups citing text evidence, revising writing based on feedback and responding to prompts displayed on the Smart Board. In a grade 3 classroom students were working in groups and using associative property as a strategy to multiply. Students use wipe boards to solve for the unknown and were able to quickly display their answers. For example, in a grade 4 class, students were using their reading response journal to respond to literal, inferential and opinion questions about the text and making sure to cite specific text-based evidence. Students used context clues to decipher the meaning on key vocabulary in the text and teacher was conferencing with a student. Although beliefs about learning are evident, students do not take ownership of their learning and high quality supports are not evident in all classrooms.
- In a grade 3 classroom, students were using multiplication and division with units of 0, 1, 6 to 9 and multiples of 10 applying the associative property as a strategy to multiply. The teacher connected the lesson to the prior learning and modeled a few examples for the class before providing an opportunity for students to use their whiteboards to try out an equation on their own. The teacher provided a differentiated activity for the diverse learners in the class offering manipulatives, sentence frames and preferential seating as supports for students. All students were engaged in the lesson, worked collaboratively in groups and partnerships as well as dialogue using academic language. However, this level of support is not yet embedded across all classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned curricula that promote college and career readiness and integrated the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are refined using data and student work.

Impact

The schools' curricula build coherence by promoting cognitive challenge for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that as a school community that embraced balanced literacy, they wanted to ensure that the selection of a Common Core aligned program would not limit learning and would be aligned to their philosophy about student learning. Therefore, the school uses Teacher's College Reading and Writing curricula and EngageNY tasks for mathematics supplemented by the Go Math program. Science and social studies instruction follows the New York City Scope and Sequence and teachers integrate content area instruction in reading and mathematics to ensure interdisciplinary learning. To address the Common Core, the technology plan outlines the necessity for students to use technology to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with other students.
- Teacher teams create plans and adjust units based on analysis of data and student work products to provide access for all learners. Teachers analyze assessment data to see the areas that students are grappling with and modify units as well as adjusting lesson plans. A review of grade 4 unit plans in reading shows goals, essential questions, assigned priority standards, anchor texts, academic vocabulary and assessments. Unit plans reflect connection to prior learning, reading complex texts to develop deep comprehension, close reading with adequate scaffolds including explicit modeling, use of visuals, clarification of vocabulary and language features are evident. Pacing calendars are created for all units and writing plans reflect various accommodations for English language learners (ELLs) including visual support, peer assistance, modified vocabulary, repetition, and additional time for students to think and respond.
- In the lower grades, the school uses World of Words, a shared book reading program designed to support academic vocabulary and comprehension. This program aims to close the reading gap for students and supports the development of vocabulary through exposure to multiple informational texts and ensuring students are able to meet the expectations of the Common Core. Class libraries are provided as well as lesson plans and materials to support and provide access to all learners.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to gauge student progress towards meeting goals across grades and subjects. Across classrooms, teachers use frequent checks for understanding and students engage in self-assessment of their work.

Impact

Assessments are used to determine student progress and make effective adjustments to curricula and instruction to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses i-Ready online assessments for reading and mathematics along with the supporting instructional resources to track student progress. Fountas and Pinnell benchmarks assess reading levels and Go Math and PARCC are used to create baseline, midyear and end-of-year assessments to monitor student progress towards mathematics standards. Data is used to identify gaps in student skills that are targeted for students who attend the Saturday program; the analysis documents also include teaching strategies that address each gap surfaced as well as the materials and/or manipulatives that teachers should utilize during instruction.
- Teachers conduct conferences with students and record information in their conference notebooks. During these conferences, students set goals using "I can" statements and new goals are generated for every unit of study. Student conference notebooks include goals and strategies; students set and monitor their own learning goals which promote ownership. Most students engage in peer conferences to evaluate their work to foster independence and ensure that students take an active role in their education. During student interviews, students talked about working with teachers during conferences in a small group or independently discussing how to improve their work.
- During teacher interviews, they indicated that exit tickets are used by most teachers to assess learning and all teachers conduct quick checks at the end of lessons which provides vital information that informs adjustment in student grouping and subsequent lessons. During a grade 2 lesson the teacher checked for understanding by using thumbs up for students to indicate their noticing of a difference in the examples presented about the goldfish. As another example, a student was asked to restate the tasks explained by the teacher to ensure understanding across the class.
- During the small group meeting with students, they spoke about using rubrics and checklist to guide their work and both were evident in the work products shared during the review. For example, a student shared a grade 5 narrative writing checklist that she used to self-assess her work which included transitions, ending, organization, craft and other features. Another student shared a grade 4 narrative writing editing checklist and rubric that was used to support her self-assessment prior to publication.

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

The majority of teachers participate in collaborative inquiry and promote the integration of the instructional shifts and achievement of school goals. Distributive leadership affords teachers a voice in decisions that affect learning.

Impact

Through team collaboration, teachers' instructional capacity and pedagogy, and progress toward goals for groups of students have improved.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet regularly and follow norms and expectations that were created for the groups. During the interview of team members, it was stated that teachers meet often and many remain afterschool to collaborate on lesson planning and share strategies. Teachers look at data to identify areas that students have difficulty in reaching proficiency and identify key standards that groups of students have not yet mastered. They work on designing common assessments to ensure coherence across classrooms. Vertical teams are responsible for creating pacing calendars and teacher teams have autonomy to make decisions since they know the students well and are trusted by school leadership.
- During the observation of the grade 5 team, teachers were discussing the midyear mathematics assessment to note trends and gaps in student learning. The process used by the team was to describe the data, interpret what is seen in the data, talk about implications for instruction and reflect on what colleagues shared, and synthesize the different perspectives from the team members. Teachers also utilize the Atlas protocol and Tuning protocol for feedback to guide conversations about the context of the work, challenges and receive input from colleagues. Teachers shared that facilitation of the team is rotated among members which builds capacity and develops leadership abilities.
- Teachers relayed that their participation in collaborative inquiry has fine-tuned their practices through sharing and observing best practices. Teachers take ownership of professional learning and turnkey information to peers. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) also support the development of pedagogy, teachers read professional articles, discuss Danielson rubric, plan focused inter-visitations, share strategies. During the review, teachers stated that involvement in PLCs promotes access to other grade level and opportunities for team members to present and respond to questions from the group. This year, teachers are exploring Response to Intervention (RtI), evaluating data and best practices for instruction.
- Teams of teachers work to ensure the shifts are integrated into curricula and professional development is provided to support teachers in improving their pedagogy. In math, the focus is building deep mathematical understanding in students and incorporating writing and discussion techniques. For English language arts, the focus is writing from sources to ensure that students are writing more and using their reading and writing notebooks, sharing their thinking with peers, researching and using technology.