



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Validus Preparatory School

High School X263

**1595 Bathgate Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Christopher Hibbert

**Date of review: May 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Claudy Makelele**

The School Context

Validus Preparatory School is a high school with 432 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 30% Black, 67% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 84.5%.

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	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		
<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 high expectations to the staff, students and their families and provide systems and supports to ensure all learners progress towards goals.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations contribute to the mutual accountability for staff, students and families, providing students with a clear path towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Multiple opportunities are given to students to promote college and career readiness. CollegeNow and Touro College partnerships allow students to accumulate credits before graduating from high school. Gear-Up provides 9th grade students with college-career readiness skills by providing free materials, workshops for American College Test (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and essay writing. College March is a tradition started at the school in which the entire school community supports the graduating cohort as they prepare and mail college applications. The entire school cheers as the senior class marches with their applications in hand.
- Parents and students are given the mission and vision of the school through orientation, the Parent Association meetings, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) night, and the School Leadership Team meetings. The Principal has an open door policy for parents and caregivers. Parents shared with me that teachers are very accessible for meetings and know their students intimately. Parents also mentioned that the school takes the students on college tours and trips and were especially happy with the fact the school places a strong emphasis on college and career readiness.
- As part of striving to ameliorate students' socio-emotional growth along with academic performance, the school has created Character Targets for which students are given grades. Similar to Character Traits, the school has implemented Habits of Scholarship, which sometimes overlap with learning targets. The character grades are weighted as 15% of the students' overall grade.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Pedagogical strategies do not consistently include targeted instructional supports, scaffolded questioning and discussion techniques or learning extensions to engage all learners in rigorous tasks and high-level discussions.

Impact

Across classrooms, students are not consistently engaged in appropriately challenging tasks for rich classroom discussions that lead to high levels of thinking or meaningful work.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are inconsistently using text-coding, Answering Higher Order Thinking and Peer to Peer Conversations (T.A.P.). Teachers are incorporating these strategies into lessons sporadically to provide students with multiple opportunities to read, think, discuss and write deeply across all content areas. Grade teams share T.A.P strategies to engage struggling and excelling students.
- School leaders conduct classroom observations using the Danielson Framework to show evidence of focus on 1E: Designing coherent instruction, 3B: Using questioning and discussion techniques, 3C: Engaging students in learning and 3D: Using assessment in action. As the school focuses on developing these areas through professional development cycles, inconsistencies in student engagement in higher level tasks and activities are evident. For example, when visiting a Science class, all students were working on the same assignment which only elicited a response to fill-in-the-blank questions.
- Teachers were inconsistently asking higher order thinking questions which lead to limited student articulation of the topics. In both history and math classes visited, teachers asked recall (Depth of Knowledge) types of questions, not eliciting insightful responses due to the lower anchored questions.

Additional Findings

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-driven professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards including the instructional shifts. Teachers consistently analyze data and student work for students they share and identify focal teaching points.

Impact

Within collaborative teams, teachers consistently enhance their practices and ensure the attainment of learning goals for students.

Supporting Evidence

- The professional development plan engages the staff in structured cycles of studies with detailed targets for every phase. In particular, the school began their first cycle on September 8, 2014 with looking at higher order questions. The teachers and teams implement a strategy and then test to see results. They then utilize the best practices to plan a new lesson which the teachers fine-tune using a common protocol. The students then are taught the lesson and student work is gathered and analyzed using a common protocol again. The Professional Development Cycles for all teachers for this past year were: Cycle1: Higher Order Questions, Cycle 2: Rigorous Engaging Pedagogy, Cycle 3: Formative Assessment, Cycle4: Differentiation and Cycle 5: Reflection and Consolidation of Best Practices.
- Grade teams meet Wednesday or Fridays during the professional period to plan Common Core aligned expeditions and case studies, look at student work and data to meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of students and complete lesson plans that include Common Core learning targets and common experiences. For example, during the teacher team meeting observed, teachers were discussing next steps for better supporting special needs students using scaffolding techniques, such as graphic organizers in math.
- The Instructional Leadership team reviews Standards-Targets-Assessments (STA) plans and provides feedback to teachers focused on aligning their curriculum to Common Core Learning Standards.
- The vertical and horizontal collaborations result in mutual accountability for student learning outcomes. Department teams meet Tuesdays weekly to support each other in aligning curriculum to standards, adjust instruction, write Standards Targets Assessment Plans, use protocols to look at student work and engage in lesson study to develop and measure the impact of lesson plans on student success. For example in a literacy team department meeting, teachers collaboratively looked at the students' baselines and midline assessment results to determine which strategies they could use to bring the students' writing to the next level.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress towards goals across grade and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

The school does not yet consistently use data analysis to guide adjustments in units and lessons to meet the learning needs of all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), thus hindering student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Currently the Instructional Leadership Team reviews Standards-Targets-Assessment Plans, gives feedback on assessments and alignment to the targets and to the Regents, based on a school-wide checklist for Standards-Target-Assessments. Through the mastery approach, students are given multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding of the concept or skill. The Instructional Leadership Team reviews extended product plans of teachers based on a school-wide rubric for extended products and gives feedbacks to teachers.
- While the school uses a school-wide grading policy based on mastery-grading, the school had not been consistent with the program used determine student progress towards goals and to be accessible to staff, students and parents. To date, the school is using JumpRope (an online grading system); however, in between the school used Skedula briefly and returned to JumpRope.
- Teachers are in the developing stages of assessing students during a lesson, specifically checking for understanding. While in some classes observed, no form of any assessment was conducted, others used exit slips or other formative assessment practices. Inconsistent methods of formative, benchmark and/or summative assessment techniques do not allow for unified approach to data analysis, instructional adjustments, and comprehensive support strategies for students based on the data.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The instructional team is in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in order to ensure that engaging and rigorous tasks and higher-order skills are accessible for all learners across grades and content areas.

Impact

At this time, the curriculum does not provide coherence across content areas and teachers do not yet consistently provide high level tasks to promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is using Universal Design by Learning (UDL) strategies inconsistently to provide multiple entry points in lessons and products for English Language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. For example, lesson plans do not provide multiple entry points for specific access to curricula and tasks for English Language Learners and students with disabilities.
- Curriculum maps developed by teachers and the administration are in the beginning stages of reviewing and providing feedback to ensure that all curricula are aligned to meet the instructional needs of all learners. For example, the plans the teachers were merging from Expeditionary Learning to teacher-created units did not include essential and medial questions within the lesson plan layouts.
- Teachers incorporate in their lesson plans differentiation for English Language Learners and special education students; however, teachers do not yet plan for modifications that truly meet the needs of all learners. In a math class, all students worked on the same problems and the teacher's lesson plan did not reveal modifications.