



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Peace and Diversity Academy**

**High School X278**

**1180 Rev. James Polite Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10459**

**Principal: John Starkey**

**Date of review: April 30, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Joshua B. Good**

## The School Context

Peace and Diversity Academy is a high school with 170 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 44% Black, 52% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 70.7%.

## 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>Developing</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>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</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>Additional Findings</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>Developing</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>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

School leaders ensure that teachers engage in structured professional collaborations and a distributive leadership structure is strengthening.

### Impact

Teacher teams are looking at student work and adjusting pedagogical practices. These instructional shifts are resulting in increased student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- The teachers meet with their grade teams once per week and with department teams twice per week. The principal indicated that not all teacher teams have clear structures or meeting processes, agenda creation, or minutes keeping or are clear on the school mission. He also noted that the special education department is struggling because of the high number of students requiring services. The principal observes team meetings, in order to strategically develop, with his cabinet, a process for strengthening the teacher teams.
- The ninth grade team, using the “Writing is Thinking through Strategic Inquiry” (WITsi) model, has a sophisticated structure for implementing strategic inquiry that is anchored in closely analyzing student work. The WITsi approach combines Judith Hochman’s Writing Revolution strategies with Nell Scharff Panero’s structured inquiry process. In the team meetings, teachers carefully assess student work using inquiry protocols to identify precise areas of student skill deficiencies. Teachers looked at the same student’s work to norm their ratings and then broke into pairs or trios where they analyzed their own students’ work. When an inquiry came regarding students’ inconsistent use of mechanics, teachers calibrated their responses. Teachers agreed and moved forward to determine next steps for students, stating that one needs sentence starters, others are ready to do it on their own and some are ready to move to sentence expansion or combining. They then plan team wide shifts in instruction. Resulting pedagogical shifts in instruction, by the ninth grade teachers were evident in the classroom visits. In the Global History class, for example, students were given differentiated tasks using the Hochman strategy, “Because, But, So.”
- Shortly after becoming principal in February, the principal created a steering committee that included teachers. The committee meets weekly and is tasked with creating a unified school vision and mission while simultaneously reviewing and revising all major school decisions and governance. A teacher on the steering team commented, “We work as a democratic body on major initiatives collaboratively and developing a plan for next year.” Through this steering committee, the teachers have a voice in determining the curricula being implemented at the school, as well as selecting organizational protocols that guide the work of the department and grade teams. Additionally through the steering committee, teachers have contributed to the creation of a renewed vision for the school.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and school-wide beliefs about how students learn best. Teachers incorporate questions designed to promote rigorous thinking and student-to-student interaction across some classrooms, but there is not evidence of high-level questions or multiple entry points provided.

### Impact

The instructional shifts and the Danielson Framework for Teaching are beginning to inform teaching practices. The varied learning needs of student sub-groups are not consistently met.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal stated his vision for the school is one where the teacher is not the center of attention but students are, when working on portfolio projects, collaborating to accomplish rigorous tasks or answer inquiry questions. Across classes, teachers are beginning to attempt a student-centered instructional approach. In the teacher team meeting, a teacher commented, “We are making some shifts in the way we are teaching ... more teachers are going for more student centered lessons.” As an example, in an earth science classroom, students were working in groups to complete a task requiring them to use Kepler’s laws of planetary motion to chart a planet’s course. Most classes though, were characterized by a teacher-centered approach with the teacher asking questions and the students responding exclusively to the teacher. For instance, in a twelfth grade English language arts (ELA) class, a teacher asked, “Why does editing come after writing?” to which a student responded, “So it won’t slow you down and you can fix it after you write.”
- Though some teacher questions were high-level Depth of Knowledge (DOK), such as the question in global history, “Should Raphael be considered a Renaissance man?” In other classes, pedagogical practice was characterized by lower-level single response questions and exclusively student to teacher discourse. As an example, in a tenth grade ELA class students were asked, “What did Martin Luther King say?” and in a ninth grade math class, “What number comes next?” to which students responded with single-word responses directly to the teacher. In a Spanish class, students responded chorally to practice statements. Next they were divided into groups of three to come to the front of the room and practice giving commands to each other. However students were not afforded the opportunity to practice prior to presenting, leaving some unsure of what to do and unclear on how to pronounce the commands. These practices keep students from acquiring a deep conceptual understanding.
- Student tasks were inconsistently provided with multiple entry points. In eleventh grade science, students were given differentiated tasks based on skill level from data-determined grouping. One group of students was given the task of translating basic units of genetic codes and another more advanced group was formulating predictions around the question, “Why might redundancy in the genetic code be an advantage to a cell?” In most other classes however, students were given singular entry-points into the learning. As an example, in Algebra I and Algebra II, all students were given identical worksheets. The resulting student learning was uneven with groups of students being unable to complete the tasks.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

The teachers have begun the process of creating and adapting rigorous Common Core aligned curricula across the content areas. Curricula and tasks inconsistently provide access to a diversity of learners.

### Impact

Some students are beginning to engage successfully with the high level tasks and are producing some meaningful work products. Curricula tasks, however, are not consistently scaffolded in a way that allows all students to be successful.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal is aware that the school is moving towards a more common core aligned curricula and that it is evident in the planning but not as much in the classroom instruction. The principal partnered with the School Renewal Initiative (SRI) and uses SRI coaches to work with specific lead teachers, in the context of weekly meetings, to begin implementing EngageNY in math and ninth grade ELA. The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) Collections is being used in twelfth grade ELA. Social studies teachers are using the curricula from the school district of Greece, NY. In an earth science curriculum map there are content standards, essential questions, assessment, labs and resources. A tenth grade ELA, an ESL lesson, and an earth science lesson plan all contained the same components within the lesson plans including, aim, essential question, instructional objectives, Common Core Learning Standards, Do Now, motivation, procedures, materials, culminating activity, exit ticket, and homework. Yet a twelfth grade ELA unit plan listed the essential questions, aims, and summative assessments, but did not list the standards being addressed. As school leaders noted, the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts are incorporated unevenly in planning documents.
- The curricular tasks are not yet consistently rigorous or aligned to Common Core standards. After the ELA teacher collaborated with the principal on creating a unit, the result was rigorously-embedded tasks, founded on the Common Core, and based in essential questions such as “When does a government become unjust?” and “When is it right for a country to go to war?” Other curricula tasks however, were composed of lower-level DOK prompts such as a social studies example where students were asked to identify three different foreign policies that have been followed by the United States.
- The curricular tasks are sometimes designed to provide access and engage a diversity of students. For example, an earth science lesson plan designed that students would use an equation to calculate the eccentricity of ellipses. The task was scaffolded through a learning activity that in addition to diagrams and equations also contained a “hands-on” activity allowing students to construct their own ellipses using thumbtacks, string, and pencils. In a tenth grade math lesson plan however, that plan provides students with an identical worksheet that contained a list of geometric translation problems without any scaffolds, thus preventing access and engagement for all students.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

The school is in the process of creating efficient structures for analyzing ongoing assessment data. Teachers are inconsistently using ongoing formative checks for understanding across classrooms.

### Impact

The school does not consistently provide strategic interventions based on common assessments and reliable qualitative and quantitative data to measure student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Irregular formative checks for understanding by teachers across classrooms result in missed learning opportunities for students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school is beginning to develop their use of common assessments to measure student progress and adjust curricula and pedagogy. In the ninth grade, the WITsi team is working closely with the SRI coaches to implement common assessments and tasks across the curricula. In February, the ninth grade teachers implemented a common writing assessment. The resulting student work was analyzed using a Looking At Student Work (LASW) protocol to uncover specific skills where the students needed further growth. After identifying conjunction use as a skill deficiency, explicit writing strategies, with accompanying tasks, were then taught by the teachers to the students to build the identified skill, and students were reassessed. For the ninth grade teachers, this work is beginning to result in ongoing assessment and regular adjustment to instruction.
- School leaders and teachers are beginning to work on formal summative assessment practices. Teachers independently design assessments for students and individually analyze the results. Some department teams, most notably the social studies teachers, review Regents exams to identify patterns and trends in student performance. Students stated that a global teacher saves all their work, because they will need it for next year and to study for the Regents exam. However, across the school, clear structural processes for documenting the analysis of formal assessments, the identified patterns and trends in student performance, and the curricular and pedagogical next steps are inconsistent.
- Teachers inconsistently use ongoing checks for understanding to ensure all students are learning. For example, in an ELA class the teacher asked students to work in groups to “find evidence so when we have discussions you have your own point.” In a student group though a student remarked, “I am not sure what to do or what would be evidence.” Additionally, in a tenth grade math class a teacher had planned to give an exit slip to the class on using a graph to solve equations, however, the teacher ran out of time and never gave the exit slip. Similarly in a living environment class, students were conducting a lab to extract DNA from strawberries and bananas. Although students were engaged in the lab, the bell rang and the class ended without summation or checking for understanding as students scrambled to clean up the lab leaving many without completing their documentation. Across classrooms, when assessing questions were asked, they generally fell into the pattern of teachers asking a question and only a few students responding, while most of the students were not provided an opportunity to demonstrate whether or not they learned the concept.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and teachers are in the process of creating a clear, consistent, culture of high expectations for all staff members.

### Impact

Although the community is beginning implement policies designed to raise expectations in order to promote staff and student learning, teachers and students are subject to a culture of low expectations. As a result, learning across the community is inhibited.

### Supporting Evidence

- Through the observation process the principal and assistant principal are beginning to provide calibrated, actionable feedback to convey high expectations to the teachers. For example in an observation, a teacher was informed that he was expected to strategically group students to promote more efficient learning for all students. The principal also refers to student work as part of the observation process to ground high expectations and teacher learning in student products, as well as documenting school wide initiatives to be implemented. For example, in another observation the principal conveyed an expectation that teachers should implement the WITsi work into their instruction. Additionally, in order to ensure that his assistant principal was also communicating high expectations, immediately upon the start of his tenure, the principal conducted five joint observations to calibrate a collective understanding and unified communication around high expectations. These expectations are also communicated to all, through a newly launched school-wide campaign to “Be PDA” which stands for the core beliefs of “Persistent, Determined and Accountable.”
- The school leaders are in the process of developing systematic training to ensure that teachers are being provided with differentiated supports to meet the high expectations. Through the work of the Steering Committee the principal is collaboratively conducting a needs assessment, identifying high-leverage areas of needed support, and then developing a school wide professional development plan. This training is currently being focused around building teacher capacity to conduct student-centered classrooms, which has been a cornerstone of the school leaders’ expectations. Further, the principal is beginning to provide personalized training for teachers through individual training plans in order to clarify high expectations. For one teacher, the principal conducted ongoing individual tutoring sessions that were followed up on each occasion with a personalized letter documenting their work.
- Teachers are in the process of developing a culture of learning that communicates high expectations for students. In the ninth grade teacher team, high expectations for student work are precise and rigorous through the Hochman Writing Revolution to generate explicit tasks involving conjunctions and subordinate clauses. After gathering student work, teachers assess the work in ongoing cycles and provide specific actionable feedback to students. Students are expected to continually improve their work products to ensure that students are well prepared to write at a collegiate level.