



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Academy of Public Relations**

**Middle School X298**

**778 Forest Avenue  
Bronx  
NY, 10456**

**Principal: Amy Andino**

**Date of review: January 14, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

## The School Context

Academy of Public Relations is a middle school with 356 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 28% Black, 71% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 16% 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 91.0%.

## 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>Proficient</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>Proficient</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>Proficient</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>Proficient</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>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

### Impact

Established inquiry-based collaborative practices promote the achievement of school goals, the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards, and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers. Further, defined leadership structures enable teachers to have a voice in key decisions that promote improved pedagogy and shared leadership with a focus on improvement of student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Administration devised a schedule that ensures teachers meet for inquiry work weekly in both grade and content teams. Teams use a protocol to look at student work and assessments, and for determining skills that require re-teaching in a different way or extensions for students who have mastered skills. Teachers use site-created common formative assessments to analyze where students are struggling and regroup students into small groups providing extensions, counseling, and reteach skills not achieved by using new tasks, strategies, and/or scaffolds until students master the targeted area for growth.
- Teachers submit agendas and minutes to administration, which monitors through daily classroom observations and weekly instructional cabinet meetings. Instructional coaches for mathematics and humanities support teacher teams by participating in meetings, informally observing, and co-planning/co-teaching with teachers. Teachers agreed that receiving immediate feedback from coaches has supported their pedagogy. Teachers stated that through the genuine work in which they engage during these teams has “built a warmth and level of trust and collegiality”.
- Team leaders meet bi-weekly to look at student work and devise instructional strategies so that all students have access to the curricula and achieve. Team leaders shared that this vertical articulation intentionally includes all departments and especially the special education department ensuring that general education teachers understand the rationale behind pedagogical moves by special education teachers who push into classes serving students with special needs. For example, teachers shared best practices to problem solve homework issues as well as vertically articulating providing counter claim and rebuttals for sixth through eighth grades, as aligned to Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers determined methods for introducing strong foundational skills in sixth grade ensuring seventh and eighth graders are poised for mastery of counter claims and rebuttals.
- Administration and teachers determined a need for teachers to receive leadership training and to that end, created the Team Leader Resident Program to develop teacher leadership on site. Teachers receive leadership and facilitation skill training as well as training on the Danielson Framework for Teaching as members of learning walks. Additionally these teacher leaders develop skills as they assume administrative duties including facilitating meetings, receiving and giving feedback, and supporting behavior programs.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best and consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, but discussion at the team level does not always focus on strategic provision of multiple entry points and extensions for English language learners and students with disabilities.

### Impact

Multiple entry points and extensions are not consistently strategic in application. Thus, some students do not have the supports and extensions they need to provide them access to challenging tasks that promote deep thinking and full engagement in and ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching and learning reflect the school-wide belief that students learn best and develop a purpose for learning when they are engaged in high levels of discussion about real world experiences. For example, in a 7th grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) humanities class, students worked collaboratively in groups to determine the text structure and how ideas develop across a text. Students had roles in groups and were highly engaged as they discussed their annotations of the text. Additionally the teachers incorporated multiple opportunities for students to think-pair-share ensuring that everyone understood the teaching point goals, directions, and next steps. Similarly in a 6th grade math class, students were divided into four rotating stations, including a computer station. Each station had step-by-step instructions, including opportunities for students' discussion to create meaning regarding real-world examples using fraction models and equations to multiply a fraction by a fraction.
- Across classrooms, teachers, mindful of the school's high percentages of English language learners (ELLs) and special education students, purposefully incorporated scaffolds and multiple entry points. For example, in a humanities class ELL students received the same lesson handouts but in Spanish and English, as well as scaffolds of visuals of characters from the text and highlighted cognates. Although their discussion was mostly in Spanish, several students accepted the option to write their answers in English. Further, in a bilingual ICT sixth grade mathematics class, the teacher provided native language supports orally and in writing during a review of the Do Now activity.
- To ensure that all students' engagement in challenging tasks, teachers use a variety of teaching strategies. For example, in an 8th grade humanities class, the teacher employed teaching strategies such as think-alouds, modeling, scaffolds, think-pair-share. Additionally, the teacher facilitated discussion by providing accountable talk stems for all students to use in small and whole class discussion for determining the central idea of a nonfiction personal account. In collaborative groups students used these stems and armed with examples from their annotated text tried to get their cite-based evidence selected in a discussion that increasingly grew the volume of productive discourse. In a 6<sup>th</sup> grade humanities class, the teacher engaged students in a gallery walk/scavenger hunt to interpret multimedia texts and images as they contribute to a nonfiction article on new discoveries of ancient Egypt and all students worked in groups using a graphic organizer that supported their learning. The art class provided multiple opportunities to discuss and answer the same essential question as the humanities classes, "How can the mistakes we help us find our way?"

## Additional Findings

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards, and integrate the instructional shifts intentionally. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

Purposeful decisions in curricula development build coherence in skill focus promoting college and career readiness for all students. Careful revision of academic tasks based on student data ensure that a diversity of learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curricula coherence is evident across classrooms. For example, seventh grade classes in humanities, in both an ICT and a general education classroom had multiple similarities, including but not limited to the unit essential question, teaching point, purpose for learning, Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts addressed, activities, and group work roles. To build coherence across the school, staff created interdisciplinary initiatives. For example in January the theme is “Finding Your Way,” the reading target is Standard R.3 focusing on how different elements interact over the course of a text, and the essential question is, “How can the mistakes we make help us find our way?”
- A review of curricular maps and lessons demonstrate revisions based on student work and data from common formative and summative assessments. Teachers demonstrated that they have a system to plan and refine lessons based on student work and assessments, supporting all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities. Administration provided coaches and teacher leaders time to revise the pacing and scope and sequence based on the State data. Coaches and teacher leaders unpacked the standards and determined the skills most commonly assessed on State assessments and aligned it to Code X. Together teachers created new common formative assessments based on this curriculum to determine further curricular revisions based on students’ needs.
- Teachers store their curricula on Google docs, providing a platform for transparency and sharing. Administration and coaches support this platform by providing feedback within the platform and via email to teachers and teams. In the curricula, by grade level, are the common formative assessments, data-folios, old and revised curriculum maps, pacing, professional development, and videos.

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

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

### **Impact**

Common assessments, well aligned to curricula, provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and result in informed adjustments to curricula and instruction.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- In an interview, students discussed how they receive rubrics for each assignment. Students stated that they keep their work in their portfolios and that rubrics help them to reflect on how to improve next time. Bulletin boards outside the classrooms demonstrated student work with rubrics and actionable feedback with clear next steps that are in student-friendly language. For example, feedback to a student regarding an essay read, "Great job connecting hard conditions to both texts. You organized your paragraphs nicely and you used direct evidence to support your position. Next time proof read for punctuation and spelling errors."
- Teachers, teacher leaders, and coaches create common formative assessments as well as common summative assessments. Staff use these assessment results to inform adjustments to curricula and instruction, as well as to revise assessments to align to the curricula revisions made. For example, staff determined that the pre/post-assessment from Code X was only multiple-choice questions and their students performed poorly on short response questions. To that end, they revised the pre/post-assessments making them open-ended and have seen a positive trend in results.
- Staff reviews several data sources to determine student progress toward goals. These data sources include common formative and summative assessments, benchmarks, portfolios, and running records. Staff uses item skills analysis data to inform curricula and teaching. For example, during the teachers of bilingual students meeting, teachers analyzed and correlated student achievement on both the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) and the New York State assessments and found that some students had consistent writing scores that plateaued. Upon further analysis, teachers determined that students needed further skill development on accuracy of answering the question posed. To this end, teachers modified curriculum and instruction to support this group of students improve on this skill set.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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**Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

**Impact**

Clear messaging and established systems of training and accountability ensure that staff understand expectations and are held accountable by administration. Students and families understand progress made toward goals due to the school’s ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance/advisement supports.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders communicate consistent messages of high expectations to staff through multiple venues such as the staff handbook, weekly memos, inter-visitation schedule, and professional development calendar. The professional development (PD) calendar, which was developed and designed by teacher leaders and coaches, is aligned to the school goals that are rooted in the Danielson Framework for Teaching and embedded with the school’s interdisciplinary initiatives. For example, the calendar for December 2014 focused on reading target for Common Core Learning Standards Standard R.2. highlighting summarization of key ideas, lens of structures and procedures. The month’s PD focus was on academic discourse to support the theme of “Appearances Can Be Deceiving”. Administration holds staff accountable through a cycle of observations, teacher team meeting agendas and minutes of collaborative inquiry, and supportive actionable feedback and next steps.
- Parents stated that the school has an open door policy, inviting them to visit, call, or email. The Parent Cafe presented by parent coordinator for those who get out of work in evening, covers topics that parents share interest in via survey. Parents are invited to monthly luncheons hosted by the principal that cover a variety of topics related to Common Core Learning Standards, student achievement, and progress toward goals. Parents stated that teachers communicate consistently regarding their child’s progress toward goals, providing updates on areas of growth or areas of needed support.
- The guidance counselor provides students with ongoing support and feedback regarding preparation for their next level by going into classrooms and supporting students and parents with the high school selection process. Students stated that they attended the high school fair and praised it. Further this year the Parent Teacher Associate (PTA) sponsored the high school fair.