



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Paul L. Dunbar Academy

Middle School X301

**890 Caudwell Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Benjamin Basile

**Date of review: April 27, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Karen Ames**

The School Context

The Paul L. Dunbar Academy is a middle school with 222 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population consists of 36% Black, 62% Hispanic, 2% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 28% 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 85.0%.

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	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 consistently communicate high expectations, professionalism and elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students and offers ongoing feedback and guidance.

Impact

Due to the supportive learning environment, teachers evidence professional collaborations and mutual growth and provide students with meaningful feedback and guidance.

Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of the school year, school leaders provide a professional handbook for staff that outlines clear expectations and professional duties. The staff handbook also includes clear expectations for classroom and hallway bulletin boards, unit planning, attendance, lesson planning, classroom observations, and the effective use of preparation periods.
- School leaders meet all teachers at the beginning of the school year to mutually discuss their professional goals for the year. Based on teacher's professional goals, school leaders incorporate professional learning opportunities tailored to meet the diverse needs of teachers as well as school-wide professional development based on the competencies of the Danielson Framework for Teachers. For example, math teachers were provided professional development on reviewing current mathematic interventions and lesson execution while the entire teaching staff was provided training in implementing effective questioning and discussion strategies.
- The school leader has incorporated a Case Management Team to consistently provide supports to students and their families who reside in temporary housing to ensure social and academic success at the school. The guidance counselor, social worker, and SAPIS teacher work closely together to carefully monitor the daily attendance, and social and academic progress of students residing in temporary housing. The team provides these students with very clear expectations as well as guidance and supports to ensure success while attending the school. Ongoing feedback to families to understand their children's academic and social progress is consistently made via phone calls, emails, newsletters, progress reports, and text messages. In addition, the school provides parents with monthly calendars that include upcoming activities and events. During the meeting with parents, it was expressed that teachers and school leaders are always made available to address or discuss their children's academic and social progress.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

Missed opportunities to engage all learners in consistently challenging tasks and higher order thinking and participation hinders students from developing deeper understanding and exhibiting their work at high levels.

Supporting Evidence

- During the leadership interview, the school leader shared that students learn best when they are supported in completing a task and when they are encouraged and allowed to be accountable for their own learning while making real world connections/applications. During classroom visits, students spent a lot of time copying notes but there were limited opportunities for student to student discussions and sharing of their thinking. For example, in a grade 7 English language arts class, the teacher asked students to write the notes about last week's assessment results and complete the worksheet but there was no opportunity to discuss the procedures and student thinking through the process they used to complete the task.
- Across classrooms there were uneven levels of student participation and meaningful discussions. Students were not consistently asked to provide evidence to support their assertions, to counter an opposing view, and/or to provide reasoning for their position. For example, in a grade 8 math class, students were asked, "what do the y-coordinates of the 2 points tell you about the distance between the 2 points (vertical)?" Students had an opportunity to discuss at their tables before offering a response. In a grade 7 science class, students were asked to answer, "how do human body systems function to maintain homeostasis?" Students did not have an opportunity to discuss at their tables or confer with their classmates.
- Although teaching points that conveyed standards-aligned instructional goals for the lesson were observed, student discussion was limited and consisted largely of individual students raising their hands to give short responses. For example, in a grade 8 social studies class when a student offered an answer to the question, "Do you think weapons remained the same between the civil war and World War I?" the teacher's response was "Good. Write that" thus limiting the opportunity for extended thinking.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Although the school ensures that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts, there is a need to build coherence across all grades and subjects. Academic tasks reflect uneven access to the curricula and do not cognitively engage a diversity of learners.

Impact

Academic tasks that require critical thinking and use of higher order skills are inconsistently embedded into the curriculum; therefore not all students are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school employs Code X for English language arts, CMP 3 for mathematics, and Glencoe for Science and American Journey for Social Studies. Math teachers use CMP3 and EngageNY instructional materials across all grades. Teachers have made some adjustments of these curricula to best meet the needs of their students. For example, a grade 6 Code X unit was amplified to include cause/effect relationships and added key questions to allow students to look deeper into the text and relate the text to another they had read. However, the practice of informing curricular decisions for all learners through the in-depth analysis of data and student work is not yet a systematic practice.
- The school leader stated that the work across vertical and horizontal teacher teams utilizes a wide array of CCLS, content standards, and aligned curricula. Teams also use a combination of Engage New York and teacher created curriculum units to support student acquisition of CCR skills. A review of the curriculum units revealed a level of inconsistency in the way teachers develop assessment tools and plan for grouping for differentiation.
- While some planning reflects grouping students based on previous administered assessments, a review of unit plans revealed that targeted supports for students who struggle are not always specific nor are they consistently seen across grades and subject areas. For example, unit plans contained few scaffolds for English language learners or students with disabilities to gain access to the curricula and engage in rigorous, challenging academic tasks. In one unit plan, the differentiation was listed as a “translated version chart for ELLs and short responses for special education students”. In another lesson the teacher listed differentiation as “pair ELL students and encourage them to narrate their experiences and understandings”.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is in the process of developing rubrics and grading policies to align with the school's curricula. The use of common assessments to measure student progress towards goals is at its initial stages.

Impact

Rubrics and grading policies are not yet fully aligned with the school's curricula so that teachers can provide only limited targeted feedback to students. Results of common assessments inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction hinders student access to understanding and goal setting.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use a variety of checklists and rubrics in their classrooms but these are not consistent across grades and subjects. Teachers are at the initial stages of looking at student work across grades measured against a standards-based rubric as a way to norm scoring criteria and employ a tool to measure progress. Across classrooms visited the use of rubrics was loosely aligned to curricula and most rubrics were generic.
- Although teachers provide suggestions for student improvement, feedback inconsistently delivers next steps based on specific, leveled rubric criteria in order to indicate how students can move to the next level. An example of teacher feedback read, "You use some textual evidence to support each perspective. However, you need to show how the text evidence connects to the topic of the paragraph". Yet others revealed broader non-specific comments such as, "Well done!", "Great job".
- Teachers have begun to set up systems to look at student work to inform adjustments to instruction. For example, after analyzing a piece of argumentative writing, grade 8 English teachers discussed ways to modify instruction which included unpacking the task to make the requirements of the task clear, spending more time on the use of transition words and citing evidence connected to the main idea. They have also devised a sheet to capture and monitor student progress. One teacher shared a comment regarding the importance of looking at student work to change instruction. However, a formal, systematic way to track student progress and the impact of teacher work is still evolving.

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

The majority of teachers engage in professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and implementation of CCLS. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work resulting in improved teacher practice.

Impact

Teacher teams engage in collaborations in analyzing assessment data and student work to improve teacher practice which results in progress towards goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Math unit plans are reviewed and analyzed to make curriculum adjustments and changes in pedagogical practices. During the teacher team meeting, teachers carefully reviewed and discussed a math unit and identified the Common Core Standards to be addressed and assessed. While reviewing the current math unit and planning for the upcoming units, teachers brainstormed possible learning gaps and misconceptions that students had, determined which interventions were necessary, and decided how to incorporate various differentiated strategies to address the diverse learning needs across the grades to include visuals, scaffolding check lists and use of technology.
- Teacher teams analyze key elements of teachers' work, including teacher classroom practice and student work for students they share or on whom they focused. During the visit, the English language arts teachers met to review and discuss students' writing samples. The team used looking at students' work protocols and an inquiry approach as they carefully analyzed and discussed the work samples. As the team analyzed the work sample, they discussed their noticing of patterns and trends. Based on their findings, the team decided to reteach the lessons and provide graphic organizers and modelling to support students' argumentative writing samples.
- School leaders have incorporated daily common preparation periods to allow all teachers the opportunity to engage in collaboration to look at student work, draft and revise lessons/units, and discuss assessments across the content area. In addition, vertical and horizontal teaming is available to look at student work on the grade and across the content areas.