



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

International School for Liberal Arts

Middle-High School X342

**2780 Reservoir Avenue
Bronx
NY 10468**

Principal: Francine Cruz

**Date of review: March 18, 2015
Reviewer: Mimi Fortunato**

The School Context

International School for Liberal Arts is a middle/high school with 524 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 0% Black, 100% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 74% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that teacher leaders facilitate grade level and content specific team meetings.

Impact

Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school, and ongoing teacher collaboration results in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal and teachers have created a school-wide, year-long instructional focus and professional learning plan that outlines the focus for all teams, and determines deliverables as well as the time frame for the completion of next steps. All teacher teams utilize a common agenda template that includes items to be addressed, the action plan, and key agreements tied to collaboratively identified deadlines. Teams maintain binders for all team documents, which teacher team leaders share with school leaders on a regular basis.
- Teachers meet weekly in grade and content specific teams, using established protocols to collaboratively analyze student work, identify student need and inform goals for students. Teachers are engaged in ongoing professional reflection and collaborations, and have developed a process to look at the outcomes of assessments, identify student need, and develop an action plan to address next steps. For example, a grade 6 cross content team was observed analyzing a student's written work using a *Looking at Student Work* protocol. In this meeting, teachers compared the student's work to an exemplar and the task specific rubric, identified areas of strength and areas of need, and strategized cross-content next steps to support the student's growth towards mastery of writing standards.
- A distributive leadership structure is embedded as an integral part of the school culture. Teacher leaders facilitate grade-level and department meetings, and teachers assume a leadership role in supporting colleagues in instructional decisions that impact student programming and curricula development. For example, two teachers have been selected to participate in NYCDOE 's *Master and Model Teacher Pilot* program, and these teachers support identified teachers across grade and content areas, identify school-wide problems of practice through informal class observations and build a common understanding of effective practice across the school.
- Teachers affirmed that they that they have significant voice in key instructional decisions, and stated that their perceptions and findings are taken into consideration. For example, teachers collaboratively develop common rubrics and assessments, and analyze the results to refine curricula. Using this process, the English, social studies, and art teachers developed an interdisciplinary curriculum for Global History, which resulted in growth in the Global History Regents pass rates from 68 to 90%.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teachers create and use common assessments, although rubrics are not consistently utilized across classrooms. The grading policy contains some redundant elements, and formative assessments do not always provide a clear portrait of student mastery.

Impact

Teachers inconsistently utilize rubrics to provide meaningful and actionable feedback to teachers and students regarding mastery of learning standards. Varying application of the grading policy, and uneven strategies to memorialize and utilize classroom formative assessment data hinder the implementation of consistently effective instructional adjustments across classes.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have developed a common grading policy that incorporates summative assessment (50%), classwork (20%), presentations/projects (20%), homework (10%), and this grading policy was posted in all classrooms. However, as the formula contains a number of redundant elements, the information provided to teachers and students does not always provide a clear assessment of mastery of learning standards. In addition, teachers are expected to develop grades for classwork in each lesson, although teachers were observed using varied methods for assessing and noting that grade across classes. For example, some teachers were observed using a system of ✓ and ✓ + to grade students during class, while others were not observed noting a grade for classwork. Across classrooms, students could not articulate how their classwork grade was calculated.
- Teachers are engaged in the ongoing process of refining assessments and rubrics, and teachers use the resulting data to plan instruction. However, teacher feedback provided to students varied across classrooms, and students shared work that provided evidence of varied assessment and feedback practices. For example, some teacher feedback on student written work in English and social studies was aligned to a task specific rubric and provided next steps to move students from one level to the next. However, on math and science work provided for review or displayed on bulletin boards throughout the school, feedback was limited to comments such as, “Great job!”, or “Excellent job, you are brilliant!” along with a numerical grade. On some math work provided for review, feedback consisted of red ✓’s and X’s.
- Students are not consistently provided with opportunities to self- or peer-assess. For example, while a Native Language Arts teacher stated that she uses self and peer assessment during class, this was not observed in classes visited. Teachers shared that, across classrooms, the assessment process does not yet consistently incorporate student reflection and self-assessment.
- Across classrooms, teachers were not observed memorializing formative assessment data, and teacher use of checks for understanding varied. For example, a US History teacher was observed informally checking in with groups of students as they worked on a task, and providing guidance as needed. However, in a Physics class, the teacher asked the whole class, “Any questions so far?” with one student responding, “No”. In this class, no apparent further check for understanding was observed, and no adjustments were made to ensure that all students understood the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, integrate the instructional shifts across grade levels and content areas, and in classes for all students.

Impact

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills and promote college and career readiness for all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The instructional team has developed curricula across all content areas that promote coherence in the grade 6 through 12 continuum, and ensure integration of the instructional shifts. For example, a 12th grade English lesson plan called for students to determine the themes of *The Crucible* and identify textual evidence to support their claims. An 8th grade Computer Technology lesson plan called for students to craft models of scatter plots of varied data sources using excel worksheets and design software, and to provide justification for the selection of data used.
- The principal has established a key instructional focus of using argumentative writing focused on discipline specific content and citing textual evidence across the curricula, aligning curricula across all content areas with Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher unit and lesson plans provide evidence of planning in building student skills and in engaging in writing tasks across 6th through 12th grade and in all content areas. In addition, all lesson plans contain a content objective as well as a language objective.
- The principal and assistant principals provide ongoing feedback to teachers regarding curriculum maps and unit and lesson plan development, emphasizing the alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Teachers plan lessons that provide a high level of rigor to ensure that higher-order skills are emphasized across grades and content areas for all learners, including the school's population of English language learners and special education students. For example, an 8th grade math lesson plan on solving a system of linear equations planned to provide a group of beginner English language learners with support through a scaffolded do now followed by plans for a group activity designed to build student understanding of the complex task expectations. A Global History lesson plan for special education students in a self-contained class included a high level learning objective of "How did the development of totalitarian governments lead to World War II?". This lesson plan outlined expectations that students would develop a thesis and support their claim with textual evidence selected from a menu of leveled non-fiction scholarly articles.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Student discussions and student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teacher practice reflects coherence around a set of beliefs regarding how students learn best and provides all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, with opportunities to engage in rich peer discussions and produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Lessons observed consistently followed a prescribed model, providing students with a content and language objective, do now, mini-lesson, guided practice, independent or group practice, a closing/reflection and exit slip. These lessons reflected coherence across middle and high school grade levels and in all content areas regarding the school's beliefs that students learn best by engaging in shared learning experiences with their peers. Lessons consistently asked students to engage in independent or group practice, and in English and social studies, students were asked to cite textual evidence to support their thinking. In math, students were given opportunities to demonstrate their thinking and justify their answers. These instructional strategies ensured that all learners, including English language learners and special education students were engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.
- In the majority of classrooms visited, students were engaged in tasks that provided them with opportunities to present their learning to their peers, or act as facilitators in the learning process. For example, in an English lesson on *Romeo and Juliet*, student leaders were observed presenting their learnings regarding the Globe Theater to their peers and fielding student generated questions. In a 6th grade humanities class on the Egyptian pyramids, student facilitators were responsible for leading their peers in a shared reading of non-fiction text and group discussion.
- Across classes viewed, there was evidence that student work products and student discussions reflected high levels of student thinking and participation. For example, in a Geometry class on using the Side Splitter Theorem, student pairs debated how the Side Splitter Theorem is used to prove similarity between two triangles through ratio and proportion. In a US History class on the woman's suffrage movement, student groups analyzed political cartoons, sharing their findings with other student groups using a jig-saw model. However, during portions of class time when teachers facilitated full class discussions, there was inconsistent student ownership of discourse, with the arrow of recitation in these instances being teacher-student-teacher.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The principal has created opportunities for collaboration and professional development opportunities for staff, as well as a system of ongoing feedback to families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

Consistent school-wide communication regarding professionalism and instruction fosters a culture of high expectations for the school community. Reciprocal communication with families helps parents understand their child's progress. Ongoing guidance/advisement supports prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to teachers through daily principal postings and frequent cycles of observation and feedback to teachers. Teachers assess their performance using a needs assessment based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and identify annual professional goals and benchmarks. Observation reports reviewed provided evidence of actionable feedback to teachers that included time-bound next steps aligned to individual teacher goals and the school's instructional focus.
- Targeted professional development aligned to the school's instructional focus and goals is provided to teachers to support them in meeting the school's expectations for professional growth. For example, teachers participate in class intervisitations, and the school has developed an intervisitation protocol with a focus point to ensure that teachers gather low inference data to share feedback with colleagues based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric and expectations.
- Parents shared that they are in frequent contact with teachers and staff members regarding their child's growth. Parents also stated that they are provided with support in understanding the school's expectations for their children through opportunities such as parent conferences where parents meet with teachers and the guidance counselor and receive information regarding preparation for the college search and application process. The school has implemented the Teacher Ease online grading system that provides students and parents with on-demand access to real-time data regarding student participation and performance. Parents affirmed that they have access to the on-line grading system, and that they use Teacher Ease to monitor their child's progress.
- Students have opportunities to participate in a range of Advanced Placement classes, as well as college level courses at the Bronx Community College through the College Now program. In middle school, all students participate in the *Think College Now* advisory curriculum, and high school students are provided with the online *Career Cruising* curriculum as part of a grant the school received through the Office of English Language Learners. In both middle and high school, students receive personalized guidance and advisement supports through a team of guidance counselors who loop with students from grades 6 through 8, and then from grades 9 and 10. Guidance counselors act as college advisors for students in grades 11 and 12, staying with their assigned students through the last two years in high school and throughout the college search and application process.