



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Creston Academy**

**Middle School X447**

**125 E. 181<sup>st</sup> Street  
Bronx  
NY 10453**

**Principal: Pamela Edwards**

**Date of review: March 16, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Amanda Lurie**

## The School Context

Creston Academy is a middle school with 471 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 13% Black, 85% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 35% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.1%.

## 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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

Distributive leadership structures and a shared vision have led to teacher teamwork that is data driven, inquiry-based and targeted, which has resulted in improved student achievement.

### Impact:

As a result of strategic, targeted and inquiry-based teacher teamwork, both teacher pedagogy and student outcomes have resulted in shared improvement.

### Supporting Evidence

- Using a teacher-developed, school-wide protocol for looking at student work, teachers are able to analyze student work across subjects and grades in a strategic and targeted way. For example, in one of the teacher team meetings visited, teachers were looking at how students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade were plotting equations on a graph. Through the use of the protocol, they were able to determine that many students were struggling to understand which quadrants on the graph were positive versus negative, and how that was impacting their ability to plot accurately. As a result of this analysis, a decision was made to reteach the lesson on positive and negative quadrants.
- As a result of a teacher-made schedule, the school is engaged in extensive teacher inter-visitation. Teachers have an “open door policy” with regard to visiting classrooms, and report that it is quite common to have a colleague “drop in” on all or part of a lesson outside of the inter-visitation schedule. Teachers also reported that this policy has led to vastly improved pedagogy, and has built comradery and trust.
- Teachers reported that school administration actively seeks out opportunities to have teachers share in decision making, and to have their voices heard. For example, teachers reported that they share in curricular decisions, have freedom to modify units as a result of teacher team work and inquiry work, and that the Professional Development calendar is completely teacher-driven and teacher-led.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings:

Teacher pedagogy reflects a belief in high cognitive student engagement, student choice, and independence.

### Impact:

While a majority of classrooms have strong pedagogical practices, there are still some classrooms that have inconsistent practice around extensions for advanced learners. As a result, high levels of thinking and ownership for some students are not evident in all classrooms.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching strategies, including questioning and scaffolds, consistently provided multiple entry points to engage English language learners and students with disabilities; however, teachers need to balance those scaffolds with opportunities to engage more advanced learners. For example, in a Social Studies 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, students were using a graphic organizer to pull evidence from a text on Seneca Falls. While the graphic organizer was a great tool for struggling learners, that same tool seemed to hold back more advanced learners from digging deeper into the text, and engaging in their own ideas and opinions on the reading.
- While a vast majority of the classrooms had high levels of student engagement, there were occasions where we saw activities that were not geared to push student thinking. In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class, for example, students were moving from station to station, looking at the three laws of motion. While some of the stations has students engaged in hands-on, inquiry based experiments, such as using different weights on a car to see how fast it would go when pushed, other activities, such as the web quest and the mini lesson handout consisted of fill in the blanks, a recall of basic vocabulary, and level 1 Depth of Knowledge questions.
- Throughout the day, teachers were consistently asking level 2 and 3 Depth of Knowledge questions. Students were able to answer at a high level, defend the answers with text-based evidence, and show their thinking. There were, however, several missed opportunities for teachers to extend the classroom discussion, by getting students to expand upon one another's answers, or extend a debate or conversation, by having students respond to one another.

## Additional Findings

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

The school has developed lessons and units that push student engagement and that are rigorous and Common Core aligned.

### Impact:

Engaging, rigorous, Common Core aligned curricula, embedded with rigorous tasks have produced student discussion and student work products that are consistently college and career ready across grades and subjects.

### Supporting Evidence

- Professional Development sessions are provided throughout the year in areas that support the Teachers College Curriculum that the school has adapted. In addition to ELA teachers, teachers of math, social studies and science also receive professional development in areas such as close reading of complex text, Depth of Knowledge, protocols for analyzing student work, the Danielson Framework for Teaching, Instructional Shifts Assessment, Academic and personal behaviors, and inquiry work.
- Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills. For example, in every classroom, we saw teachers using the workshop model, which included group process and group discussion. Students were consistently able to engage in discussions, cite evidence and explain their thinking and reasoning. Graphic organizers, framed around level 2 and 3 Depth of Knowledge questions, were consistently seen across classrooms.
- Materials and curricula are accessible to all learners, including students with disabilities, and English language learners. In all classrooms observed, strategic groupings, tiered reading, graphic organizers and scaffolded materials ensure that all learners have access to rigorous curricula, high level tasks, and are cognitively engaged. In many classrooms, for example, students with disabilities were working on Achieve 3000, or other modified versions of materials in parallel with the rest of the class.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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**Findings:**

The school strategically uses assessments that are aligned to curricula to analyze information on student learning outcomes and adjust instruction decisions.

**Impact:**

As a result of a rigorous assessment cycles, the school makes strategic, data-driven decisions about curricula and lesson planning. Embedded, school-wide practices have created a culture where teachers continually make effective adjustments to meet the needs of all students, and students are aware of their next learning steps.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school uses common assessments across subjects, to create a clear picture of how students are progressing. The school strategically uses assessment cycles to analyze student data and make curricular adjustments. Teachers are engaged in a rigorous inquiry process around assessment data to fine tune their lessons and units and to reflect on their pedagogy. Teachers grade common assessments in committees, to ensure that common benchmarks, across grades and subject areas are met.
- The school uses extensive feedback and conferencing notes to ensure that progress monitoring is continuous and in real time. In every class observed, for example, all teachers had extensive conferencing notes that were accessible.
- Students are engaged in a rigorous editing process that includes teacher and peer feedback. Students know how to give feedback, based on common rubrics, with which they are familiar, to help refine their own work, and that of their peers. All ELA classes had evidence of extensive teacher and peer feedback, which included “commendations”, “recommendations” and “next steps.” The school uses common reading, writing and discussion rubrics that are rigorous and push student thinking.
- Exit slips, equity sticks and “turn and talks” were observed in every classroom. Teachers strategically used ongoing checks for understanding to make adjustments and modifications to their instruction. For example, a student was struggling with reading and vocabulary at one table in an ELA classroom. When the teacher came around during the “Turn and Talk” and realized this, she guided the student to a laptop and put him on “Achieve 3000” as a way of better understanding that part of the lesson. Teachers, in every classroom stopped and checked for understanding at various junctures of the lesson, including the medial and end points of the lesson.

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

School leaders and staff effectively communicate high expectations to students and parents around college and career readiness.

**Impact:**

As a result of effective and targeted outreach and communications to students and families, a culture for learning has been established. That culture systematically communicates a set of high expectations for all students, and ensures that all students are on a clear path to college and career readiness.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Parents report that the school provides many opportunities for parents to become more involved in their child’s education. Some examples of those opportunities are workshops that focus on Common Core Learning Standards, content area curriculum, how to use Engrade, and the impact of bullying. Parents report that the school has an open door policy, and that they are welcomed and encouraged to be partners with the school.
- Many examples of effective communication were seen throughout the day. The school has a parent calendar, a student calendar, a student and staff handbook, bulletin boards and newsletters that make everyone in the school community aware of events, workshops and other opportunities.
- Students, parents and staff report that one of the biggest celebrations in school is the celebration of students who make the Principal List and honor roll, four times a year.
- The high school application/admissions process is a large focus in the school. The school involves parents in every step of the process, and charters buses to get parents to attend high school fairs. Parents and students reported that they feel that they have the necessary information, based on all of the schools outreach efforts to make informed decisions about where to apply to high school.