



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**Felisa Rincon de Gautier Institute for Law and
Public Policy**

08X519

**1440 Story Avenue
Bronx
NY 10473**

Principal: Grismaldy Laboy-Wilson

**Date of review: February 5, 2105
Lead Reviewer: Richard Cintron**

The School Context

Felisa Rincon de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy is a high school with 341 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 26% Black, 70% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 81.0%.

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	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	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	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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based collaborations. Distributed leadership structures allow teachers to have a voice in key decisions across the school.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has strengthened teacher collaboration resulting in improvements to pedagogical practices and a stronger voice in key decisions affecting supports for student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet seven times a week in their teacher teams to work on their practice, analyze student work and discuss specific instructional strategies related to increasing student achievement for struggling students. One period is devoted to lesson planning, two periods are devoted to analyzing student work and discussing instructional strategies, two periods are devoted to the creation of formative and summative tasks, and two periods are devoted to increasing parent communication and supporting student's social and emotional health. Teachers spoke to how these collaborations have been instrumental in helping to improve their practice. For example, several teachers spoke to how they have seen growth in their ability to plan differentiated support for struggling students specifically in the area of citing evidence and have begun to see increases in student achievement on end of unit exams. The principal showed evidence from Advance that teacher's questioning skills have shown an increase since teacher teams have been focusing on questioning during peer intervisitations.
- At an English language arts teacher team meeting, teachers were observed examining student work and the related end of lesson task students had completed in a tenth grade class. After norming student scores, teachers offered feedback towards improving the task which consisted of ensuring that both the rubric and the task were more clearly aligned and that the teacher should incorporate peer assessment into the lesson so students could receive feedback before attempting the final summative task.
- During two teacher team meetings, teachers spoke about how they have a strong voice in school-wide instructional decisions and their leadership is valued. For example, teachers explained how the administration has created a new professional development team consisting of all teacher team leaders. This team meets once a week with the administration to discuss teacher reflections and feedback regarding professional development in order to improve the delivery as well as provide further targeted support as needed. Teachers explained how this new process of regularly seeking teacher feedback has led to more instances of targeted support based on teacher need. For example, the professional development team was able to partner with the network to provide additional support towards supporting English language learners after teachers voiced a concern that in addition to whole-school professional develop, teacher felt a need for small group sessions in their content areas.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide entry points into the lesson and student discussions reflect uneven levels of student understanding.

Impact

In most classrooms, the limited facilitation of student-led discussions and active student engagement curtailed opportunities to promote higher order thinking and rigorous participation, thus hindering students from demonstrating their thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- In classrooms visited, some teachers asked only low level recall questions that did not call for students to strategically think or to extend their thinking. In a chemistry class, the teacher asked several questions regarding content covered in previous lessons prompting simple word answers from the students and then summarized the student's answers for the rest of the class. In an English class, the teacher explained that students would be assigned group roles and then asked various students to read the roles out loud to the class. After the students had finished reading, the teacher then summarized what the students had just read and asked if there were any questions before moving on to the next student.
- Although the principal spoke to a focus on students analyzing text and citing evidence in their writing and speaking in humanities classes, and students applying concepts learned in class to real world situations in math and science classes, these practices were not consistently observed across the majority of classrooms visited. In one English class, as students answered questions concerning a short video they had just watched they were not asked to cite evidence from the video to justify their answers. In another English class, as students answered questions from the teacher regarding the text they had just read, they were not asked to cite evidence from the text to defend their answers.
- Although the use of scaffolds such as the identification of key vocabulary words, the use of technology, and purposeful grouping were seen in some classes, these practices were not consistently seen across classrooms limiting some student's ability to access higher level tasks. For example, in a science classroom, although students were grouped purposefully to start with a different introductory task, not all students were given the opportunity to engage with the higher level tasks that the rest of the class was working on.
- When asked, several students across classrooms could not articulate what they were learning and why it was important. In a science class where students were learning about the importance of all species in an ecosystem, students could not explain why they were learning about horseshoe crabs. In a math class where students were learning how use a graphing calculator to solve various problems, when asked how they would use this knowledge in the future students responded that they believed it was going to be on a test at some point.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are consistently emphasized in curricula and tasks across grades and subject areas for all students.

Impact

The school's purposeful curriculum decisions build coherence and promote cognitive engagement and college and career readiness for all learners, including English language learners (ELLs), students with disabilities and highest achieving learners. Students are consistently exposed to higher level tasks across grades and content areas, are required to demonstrate their thinking, and are provided with the necessary supports to access those tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has created templates for curriculum maps, unit plans and lesson plans that have been adopted by the vast majority of teachers and has developed a process for teachers, administrators, and network support specialists to peer review all teacher work products. The principal was able to show evidence of curriculum maps, unit plans and lesson plans across content areas and grades that had been revised, based on peer feedback, to ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards. The principal also spoke to how this process has helped teacher's develop their skills in designing end of unit tasks and showed samples unit plans that revealed how the amount of feedback given to teacher's from peers, the network, and administration has decreased since the beginning of the year and alignment of first or second drafts of tasks have increased.
- A review of written lesson plans across all content areas revealed that in-class summative tasks consistently emphasize higher order thinking skills such as evaluating a speaker's point of view and their use of evidence to defend their ideas, developing logical arguments, analyzing information from multiple sources, and applying concepts in real world situations.
- A review of written unit plans and lesson plans across all content areas revealed numerous scaffolds and entry points such as purposeful grouping, the use of visual aids and technology, scaffolding questions, flexible use of time, one to one conferencing, sentence prompts, and the identification of key vocabulary.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teachers inconsistently use rubrics to provide students with actionable feedback regarding their next learning steps. The practice of teachers regularly checking for understanding and incorporating student peer and self-assessment is emerging.

Impact

The inconsistent use of rubrics, checks for understanding, and student peer and self-assessment limits teachers ability to meet all students needs and for students to fully articulate their own progress towards mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Student work displayed in hallways and classrooms did not consistently include rubrics with targeted feedback from teachers on next steps for how students could improve. Although students spoke to how they use rubrics for assignments and how teachers confer with them to provide next steps, they mentioned that the majority of the time this type of feedback and conversation occurs with end of unit performance tasks or larger research papers and not for in-class assignments.
- Across classrooms, teachers' use of checks for understanding varied. For example, in a music class, while students worked collaboratively, the teacher individually spoke with each student to ensure they could provide one example of a simile and metaphor before eventually continuing the lesson and asking students to share out their response as a whole class. In other classes, teachers only asked questions to the whole class or called on select students to determine if all students understood and then after receiving a few answers moved on with the lesson.
- Across classrooms, teachers' use of peer and self-assessment practices varied. In a math class, students worked in groups and then graded each other's work before sharing it with the entire class. In other classrooms visited, although students worked together on similar problems, they did not peer or self-assess their work or other students work. This resulted in some students not being able to articulate what they were working on and why it was important and others once they got stuck, not being able to complete the task.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

High expectations are consistently communicated to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and professional development opportunities. Leadership and staff offer ongoing feedback to families to support student progress towards high expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

Collaboration and support among staff, students, and families fosters high expectations for all and prepares students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- During a student meeting students spoke to how teachers and counselors across all grade levels regularly speak to them about college and career readiness and how to improve their chances of obtaining the best possible diploma option and the right college or career choice that fits their interest. For example, two students mentioned how conversations with teachers led to them to push themselves to take Advanced Placement courses. The principal also spoke to how the number of students taking honor and Advanced Placement courses has increased this school year as well as the number of students taking college level courses. Students also mentioned how they regularly participate in Town Hall meetings where they learn about different career options and regularly participate in college trips and leadership trips.
- The parent association president spoke to how teachers and the administration have worked closely with parents this year to help them support students both inside and outside of the classroom. An example would be the school's new Climate and Culture Center that supports student's social, emotional and academic growth by providing counseling and increasing student opportunities to work in the local community around such as issues as increasing awareness of breast cancer and improving recycling efforts. The school also invested in a school-wide online grading system called Jupitergrades.com that has improved communication between parents and teachers. Teachers regularly provide updates to parents about attendance, homework, upcoming exams and trips, discipline, and curriculum. Parents receive regular messages and can communicate with teachers whenever they have questions or concerns. Students spoke about how they can email teachers for additional help whenever they need it, and that teachers are available before and after school.
- A review of the school's faculty handbook clearly outlines all staff professional responsibilities and expectations and is regularly reviewed throughout the school year to ensure familiarity and relevance. Topics include the school's academic goals, the citywide instructional expectations, individual teacher expectations as well as expectations for teacher team. The principal spoke to how the staff revisited the schools vision statement and core beliefs and revised both to ensure alignment to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school's focus on college and career readiness for all students.
- The principal met with all teachers individually to develop learning plans based on previous observation data and identified areas of interest. The school's professional develop team works collaboratively to ensure professional learning is addressed in whole group, small group and individually by taking into account teacher reflections after all professional learning experiences.