

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**New Explorers High School**

**High school X547**

**730 Concourse Village West**

**Bronx  
NY 10451**

**Principal: Jacob Hobson**

**Dates of review: January 14, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

## The School Context

New Explorers High School is a high school with 475 students from Grades 9 through 12. The school population comprises 32% Black, 67% Hispanic, 0.4% White, and 0.2% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 80.2%.

## School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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>Developing</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>

### School Culture

<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>

### Systems for Improvement

<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

**Quality Indicator:**

**4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development**

**Rating: Proficient**

### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that are focused on looking at student work and data analysis via inquiry-based protocols. Teacher team structures provide opportunities for teacher leadership across the school and promote their participation in decision-making about student learning.

### Impact

The work of teacher teams across the school strengthens teachers' pedagogical capacity and results in improved practice that affects student progress.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal has organized teacher teams around two focus areas: instruction and systems for improvement. The majority of teachers are engaged in these formal structures which consist of team meetings, three to five times a week. The content area teams engage in lesson study and use protocols for analyzing student work and progress. The Principal's Leadership Circle meets weekly and focuses on reviewing school data as well as making decisions school wide about instructional and organizational initiatives. For example, as a result of teachers and administrators analyzing discipline and credit accumulation data, the guidance department has been restructured to deliver direct student support aligned to expectations for college and career readiness of students.
- Teacher teams have made key decisions to ensure instructional coherence across the school. There is evidence of key decisions around planning evidenced in lesson plan templates and the use of learning targets in all lessons. Teachers across the school have reorganized their classrooms and seating plans to promote student to student interactions, feedback and collaborative work. As a result teachers have strengthened the use of fishbowl, Socratic seminar and turn and talk strategies to promote student discussion.
- There are multiple opportunities for teacher leadership in the leadership circle, content teams and inquiry work. In one team for example, teachers expressed that the opportunity to discuss their classroom experiences and observations of students' needs for reading and writing strategies has led to sharing of best practices, consulting colleagues for specific adjustments to instruction and sharing and norming of rubrics to assess student work. These teacher led discussions are informing school wide pedagogical shifts and have increased teacher input into the instructional expectations school wide.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

### Findings

Across the school, some lessons reflect the pedagogical expectations of the common core learning standards as well as the school's belief that students learn best when they are engaged in collaborative problem-solving and rigorous tasks. Teaching strategies that facilitate student thinking and discussion are emerging.

### Impact

Teacher use of group work, questioning and facilitation strategies do not always extend student thinking nor promote participation across classrooms. Thus, some lessons do not yield opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking skills or to complete challenging tasks.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school's beliefs that students learn best when they are engaged in a productive struggle has informed their instructional focus for the year. Teachers across classrooms are developing structures and routines to ensure that students work together to solve problems and share their strategies, analyze text together and have evidence based discussions. These emerging practices are reflective in most classrooms. Teachers' use of a common workshop template to organize lessons which include essential questions, opportunities for students to work together and higher order questions are becoming aligned to school wide beliefs and increasing instructional coherence.
- Some lessons are designed to promote students' use of text based evidence in higher order discussions. For example in a social studies class, students discuss the Russian socioeconomic system under Lenin and are required to make reference to their notes and to a primary source about censorship in their discussion. In an English lesson, students engage in analysis of text to discuss their annotated poem, "Thou Blind Man's Mark". However, in some lessons, although the learning targets were defined on the board, students were generally off task and disengaged as the teacher repeatedly tried to gain attention to the objective. Thus, there are inconsistent learning experiences for students across the school.
- Some tasks are rigorous and demand that students engage in the productive struggle identified as the school's instructional focus. However, as stated by some students observed having completed a task before the vast majority of classmates, "Sometimes the work is easy and I just have to wait." Opportunities for accelerating learning for this and other students are missed.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across grades and subjects curricula are aligned to the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards and reflect the integration of instructional shifts. Academic tasks and lessons are adjusted based on the analysis of student work and data.

### Impact

The school's coherent curriculum promotes higher order thinking and college and career readiness for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers have engaged in curriculum development and unit planning since 2012 using Understanding by Design as their framework. Across content areas, units and lesson reflect content standards in line with the expectations of the CCLS. A review of curricular artifacts and lessons reveal that teachers consistently plan using common templates and outlines to ensure that learning targets and tasks are CCLS aligned and promote college and career readiness skills
- Teachers have established benchmarks for mastery of content standards for each content area across grades. This has led to instructional coherence and increased consistency in pacing of units of study. Additionally, assessments, both formative and summative, are aligned to the standards and to the learning targets in the curriculum. Teachers use the Cognitive Rigor Matrix, and Webb's Depth of Knowledge as well as the Tri-State rubric to assess rigor in their units of study and lessons.
- Modifications to lessons, unit assessments and tasks are made in order to meet diverse learning needs of students. Based on analysis of student work and data about student proficiency in English or specific learning needs, teachers include modifications in their planning. Some examples of adjustments include closed captioning for videos, native language support as available in resources, academic language support using the Frayer model, graphic organizers and acronyms for close reading strategies which helps students remember to focus, infer, predict and summarize as they read.

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

Across subjects and classrooms teachers create assessments and rubrics that are aligned to the school's curriculum. Feedback to students is rubric-based and provides information to teachers about student progress.

### **Impact**

Teachers use analysis of data from common assessments and student work to make adjustments to instruction and units of study. Students use their individual assessment results and teacher feedback to revise and improve their work.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers ensure that they use common rubrics and assessments across the school. They utilize the MOSL rubrics as well as other research based resources to aid them in the collaborative design of assessments. An example of a shared rubric is the argumentative writing rubric, which ensures that students develop the same type of approach to their essays as they progress through grades. Students state that they often help to identify the elements that will form the criteria for their work; thus, their input becomes part of the rubric, which promotes clear understanding of their own progress towards goals within a task.
- A teacher team observed used a protocol for Looking at Student Work to discuss an individual student's written work. The task required students to analyze and respond to the text, "Growing up Asian in America." Teachers indicated that the process begins by looking at the students' profiles which includes student achievement data available in the school's online progress monitoring system. Additionally, teachers check to see if students are using reading strategies such as SOAPSTONE which remind students of the elements of good writing such as speaker, occasion, purpose, subject and tone. Teachers state this collaborative review and discussion of student products allows them to make adjustments to lessons for individual students as well as apply strategies for whole class instruction
- Students state that all of their teachers use rubrics to help them understand the quality of written work and projects they work on with their classmates. The feedback they receive helps them to improve their work and keeps them focused on getting the "4" or the highest rating. Some students indicated that teachers meet with them at lunch time to go over their assessments and give them personal, verbal feedback that helps them identify their next learning goals.

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

The school has a variety of systems and structures that are utilized to communicate high expectations for teaching and learning connected to a path for college and career readiness to all members of the school community.

### **Impact**

Feedback to teachers via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching ensures that teachers are supported in meeting high expectations for pedagogy. Families receive information from the school about students' academic progress that enables parents to support their children in preparation for post-graduation academic and career goals.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The Danielson framework serves as the core for communicating expectations about the teaching practices in the school. Observations result in very specific and targeted feedback about the components prioritized across the school around questioning strategies, facilitation of discussion and engaging student in tasks that require a productive struggle. In addition to supervisors expressing the expectation, teachers set goals for themselves and hold one another accountable during intervisitations and collegial feedback sessions about observed lessons.
- The school has restructured the guidance department to provide direct services to students and their families aligned to college and career readiness goals. The guidance counselor works closely with teachers and families and promotes a culture of dignity and respect. The school wide character education program which is embedded in class workshops, assemblies and monthly celebrations emphasizes the qualities of good citizenship and scholarship as students prepare for the world beyond high school.
- Families state that they are informed frequently about their children's progress and can access information through Skedula, the school's online progress monitoring system. Parents of a new student expressed the very thorough and nurturing welcome/orientation they received by the school's staff and administrators. They say the school has been very supportive as their daughter transitions through a new school environment and feel confident that she is getting the information she needs to access post-secondary opportunities. Parents participate in workshops related to the college application and financial aid process and receive ongoing information both online and via regular mail that keep them informed about their child's progress towards the expectations of timely graduation and high academic achievement.