



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Discovery High School

10X549

**2780 Reservoir Avenue
Bronx, NY 10468**

Principal: Rolando Rivera

Date of Review: October 27, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Mimi Fortunato

The School Context

Discovery High School is a high school with 514 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 17% Black, 79% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 84%.

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	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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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

Senior teachers assume the role of instructional coaches and lead teams of core content area teachers in ongoing, inquiry-based professional collaboration and reflection aligned to the school's instructional goals, with a targeted focus on the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.

Impact

The school's commitment to distributive leadership and teacher professional growth builds a cohesive professional learning community, promotes improved teacher practice, and provides teachers with a voice in instructional decision-making.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has created structures and systems that support ongoing teacher inquiry-based collaboration in core content teams. Teams meet three times each week, reflect on individual and shared practice, and support professional growth for all members of the team. Teachers participating in a cross content team meeting shared that they value the opportunity to engage in frequent professional collaborations and are aware that the school's emphasis on professional reflection has resulted in documented improvement in their practice as measured by the Danielson Framework for Teaching.
- Content area teacher team meetings are structured to engage teachers in professional conversations aligned to the school instructional goals of improved teacher practice in student data and work analysis, questioning and discussion techniques, and facilitating student-centered and engaging lessons that are aligned with expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers in an English language arts (ELA) team meeting shared that core content department teams engage in an ongoing process of shared reflection on practice with a goal of strengthening the team's overall pedagogical practice.
- Lead instructional coaches facilitate core content team meetings. These senior teachers have been trained by the principal to conduct professional development workshops, instructional intensives, and informal observations. Instructional coaches are responsible for developing a plan for each meeting, with teams of teachers collaboratively developing protocols for reviewing student work and developing next steps, such as the *ELA Inquiry Team Analysis of Student Data and Instructional Implications* protocol that was observed in use during an ELA team meeting. This distributive leadership structure provides opportunities for teacher voice in instructional decision-making and in the implementation of targeted instructional changes across classrooms.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The principal has shaped a shared belief around how students learn best and built coherence in the implementation of the instructional shifts and a Common Core Learning Standards aligned curricula informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching as demonstrated by meaningful student participation and work products.

Impact

Lessons across core content areas are facilitated using shared instructional approaches and strategies, providing all learners with opportunities to engage in rigorous tasks and rich peer-peer discussions, although students are not yet consistently taking ownership of their learning in class discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has established a system by which trends in teacher practice are evaluated, and targeted professional development is provided to teachers to ensure coherence in the implementation of instructional shifts across classrooms. For example, teachers are expected to facilitate lessons that include a set of collaboratively developed essential lesson elements. In addition, school designed rubrics such as the *Oral Questioning Rubric*, *Student-Centered Rubric* and a *Rubric for Effective Question Construction* are used to norm understanding of shared beliefs and expectations regarding instructional practice.
- Teacher practice consistently demonstrates an emphasis on the instructional shifts of building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts, reading and writing grounded in evidence from text, regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary, and math and science fluency and application. For example, students in a US history class were observed analyzing images and text with a goal of inferring the central idea of the text excerpt that described the Jewish immigrant experience in the early twentieth century. An essential question in an Algebra class lesson asked students to consider the question, “Why are some situations best modeled by discrete domains, and others best modeled by continuous domains?” These tasks and questions extend students’ thinking and enrich class conversations.
- A Think-Pair-Share (TPS) protocol has been implemented across core content classrooms, providing students with opportunities to work with their peers to develop oral and written arguments using textual evidence to support a claim. Students were observed using the TPS protocol in a US history class as they identified how textual evidence from *Immigrant Kids* by Russell Friedman is different from textual evidence from *A Slave Narrative* by Gustavus Vassa, shared their evidence and reasoning regarding how the evidence was similar with their partners, evaluated their partners’ evidence regarding how their evidence was different, and worked together to respond to the question, “How is the immigrant experience described in *Immigrant Kids* similar and different from the experience described in *A Slave Narrative*?” Across the vast majority of classrooms students responded to teacher generated oral questions during full-class discussions, although students were not observed initiating or extending class conversations.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The instructional team is engaged in ongoing refinement of curricula to align with the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts, and curricula and tasks are consistently planned to emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Lessons and tasks across core content areas are developed collaboratively, and are planned to provide learners with opportunities to engage in rigorous tasks and rich discussions. However, teacher planning is not yet embedded in a coherent way so learners in all classrooms, including English language learners and students with disabilities, have opportunities to demonstrate high-level thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Core content area vertical teacher department teams collaboratively create six-week cycle curricula maps and course calendars that emphasize Common Core Learning Standards, content information, and key college and career readiness skills that students are expected to master. Teams use the process of ongoing curricula refinement to promote vertical alignment. For example, the *English Course Skills Calendar* identifies key reading strategies such as making predictions, inferring new information, and identifying abstract and concrete language that are taught explicitly in grade 9 early units of study, and embedded in modeling in units that follow.
- The instructional team has developed a school-wide unit and lesson plan template to build coherence across content areas. Curricula maps and lesson plans in the core content areas consistently emphasize high level skills aligned with Common Core Learning Standards, and the school's expectations for college and career readiness. For example, a lesson plan for intermediate English language learners expected students to analyze the text, *Ambush*, by Tim O'Brien, identify the conflict as internal or external, and explain the nature of the conflict. However, lesson planning across all classrooms did not always ensure that all learners had opportunities to fully engage in high-level thinking, as evidenced by the number of English language learners and students with disabilities in mainstream classes who were observed struggling to fully engage with the language and/or content in the planned tasks and activities.
- Teacher lesson plans integrate the arts, college and career readiness skills and the use of instructional technology. For example, an earth science class lesson plan included opportunities for students to utilize an online program, *Sun Motions Demonstrator* to construct and analyze diagrams of the Sun's path in different locations in the Northern and Southern hemisphere. An Advanced Placement US history lesson plan expected students to read an excerpt from *John Trumball Art and Politics in the Revolution* by Morgan Sumrell, view the historical paintings *Declaration of Independence* and *General Warren at Bunker Hill* by John Trumball, and the poster, *Hope*, created by contemporary artist Shepard Fairey, and analyze the ways in which these images might serve as examples of cultural identity in America.

Findings

Core content area teacher teams have collaboratively developed common periodic and summative assessments and rubrics aligned with the school's curricula, and use the resulting data from student work analysis to plan for adjustments to instruction at the teacher team and classroom levels.

Impact

Teacher growth in effectively analyzing data to identify gaps in learning, to inform curricula and instructional adjustments, provides a variety of learners with actionable and targeted next steps to supporting student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has implemented a periodic assessment process in which cyclical, cumulative, and collaboratively developed examinations are administered in six-week intervals throughout the school year. These assessments have been designed to produce data that informs the instructional team of student mastery of skills as measured by pre-determined standards of each academic course. Teachers are expected to analyze the results of these assessments using a *Periodic Assessment Analysis Worksheet* in which they describe the results, infer the reasons behind the outcome and develop a plan of action to address identified learning needs. The instructional leadership team, (consisting of the principal, assistant principal, and three instructional coaches) review these *Periodic Assessment Analysis Worksheets* and facilitate twice-weekly meetings to support the implementation of next steps, with a goal of improved teacher practice in assessment analyses and instructional adjustments.
- The instructional team has collaboratively developed course and task specific rubrics aligned to the school's curricula, Common Core Learning Standards, and the expectations of New York State Regents exams. In addition, teachers utilize a school created *Student Progression Analysis Report* in which they are expected to assess individual student work, target areas for improvement, and track progress and next steps.
- The team has collaboratively developed a *Discovery Writing Rubric*, and students in a free-standing ESL class were provided with a modified *ESL Discovery Writing Rubric*, and those in a self-contained special education History class were provided with a modified *Discovery's Excelsior Writing Rubric*. However, it was not clear how English language learners and students with disabilities in mainstream classes, might be assessed or supported, to meet their diverse learning needs, and some students in classes observed remained unclear as to their progress and next steps.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The principal has developed a recursive cycle for instructional improvement, holds teachers accountable for high expectations through a system of conducting frequent formal and informal observations, and provides a program of professional development supports for staff in meeting expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The instructional and guidance team facilitate college and career learning opportunities for students, and families are provided with access to the Jupiter online grading and student progress reporting system.

Impact

The weekly informal observation and feedback cycle provides teachers with frequent actionable feedback regarding professional growth and next steps, and student engagement in advanced placement and college level courses and reciprocal communication with families contributes to a culture of high expectations for all members of the school community.

Supporting Evidence

- Cycles of formal and informal observation and feedback provides teachers with clear expectations for professional growth. A frequent schedule of Learning Walks (in which teams of teachers led by teacher instructional coaches visit their colleagues) engage the instructional team in a process of norming and calibrating the school's expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching.
- Instructional supervisors lead on-site thrice weekly professional development called *Intensives*, providing teachers with ongoing targeted support in professional growth. The foci of this professional learning are an outgrowth of trends in practice noted in cycles of informal and formal observations, such as oral questioning and questioning construction and formative assessment and adjustment to instruction.
- A guidance counselor is assigned to support the college search and application process, and students are offered opportunities to participate in advanced placement courses and in college level classes at Lehman College through the College Now program. In addition, college trip and tours to schools such as Northeastern University, Emerson College, Connecticut College, Marist College, and Vassar College provide students with opportunities to identify colleges that best fit their interests and academic needs.
- The school uses the Jupiter internet-based interactive grade reporting system to apprise families of student progress towards identified student progress towards graduation and college and career goals. In addition, parents reported that the parent coordinator, guidance team, and teachers pro-actively communicate with families on an ongoing and frequent basis, and that workshops are available to support parents in the college search and application process.