



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Westchester Square Academy

08X558

**3000 E. Tremont Avenue
Bronx, New York
NY 10461**

Principal: Sara Dingley

**Date of review: December 10, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Amanda Lurie**

The School Context

Westchester Square Academy is a high school with 399 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 26% Black, 57% Hispanic, 9% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

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 quarterly assessment cycle, 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 quarterly common assessments across subjects that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, and Regents exams. Assessment benchmarks are created, so that essential skills and context knowledge are reviewed by all teachers in the vertical team, and are revised accordingly. Teachers are expected to provide critical feedback to their colleagues, and assessment content and format are designed and revised as a team. Teachers across each subject area also grade common assessments as a team, using a Quarterly Assessment Analysis Tool and Instructional Plan that looks specifically at learning gaps, and focuses on standard specific benchmarks. The data obtained from the quarterly assessments is then strategically used to design a “re-teach week”, where all content and standards not mastered on the quarterly assessment are reviewed and re-assessed.
- The school creates inquiry cycles around their quarterly assessment data. These inquiry cycles focus specifically on students with disabilities, English language learners, students in the bottom third, and students who did not achieve mastery from the previous inquiry cycle. The inquiry cycles are formed using the data from the Quarterly Assessment Analysis Tool, and teams use a protocol (Data Driven Dialogue Phase IV Inferences from SRI) to drive their work.
- Across all classrooms, teachers strategically use ongoing checks for understanding. Exit slips, “Stop and jots” and “turn and talks” were seen consistently, and at several junctures within each lesson. Teachers were conferencing as students worked within their groups.
- A review of student work revealed consistent use of the school-wide writing rubric, and ongoing and actionable feedback from teachers. Students could easily articulate why they received a certain grade, where they needed to improve, and what they had to do to reach their next learning target. Students discussed both a self and peer editing process that had been put into place in their classes to review work before having it reviewed by a teacher. Final draft quality work viewed, consistently went through a rigorous editing process that moved writing to the next level.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings: Pedagogy consistently reflects a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and the Danielson framework, however, extensions and opportunities to engage higher performing students were inconsistent.

Impact: In most classrooms, teaching strategies, including questioning and scaffolds enable students to produce meaningful work product that demonstrates their thinking and participation, however, supports and extensions for higher performing students were not observed in all classrooms, resulting in missed opportunities to engage all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching strategies, including questioning and scaffolds consistently provided multiple entry points to engage students with disabilities, and English language learners in high level discussion and evidence-based work. In some classes, however, teachers did not provide extensions for higher performing students. As a result, those students often did not move their discussions and work to the next level. While the school has moved to engage all learners with challenging, college level classes and coursework, more work needs to be done to help teachers balance their use of scaffolds in a way that does not hold back higher performing students. For example, in an Advanced Placement History Class, students were using a graphic organizer to look at three different paragraphs from a presidential inaugural address. Students had to annotate and cite evidence, based on questions from a graphic organizer. While the graphic organizer allowed struggling students to unpack to complex text, more advanced students were held back by the same activity. Many of those students were ready to look at the document in its entirety, and to synthesize the information into a higher level discussion, but were not pushed to do so.
- In all classrooms, teachers consistently asked level 2 and 3 Depth of Knowledge questions. Students participated in class discussions and offered answers that showed critical thinking. Rather than extend the discussion, however, many teachers either reframed student responses, or moved on to another questions, thus not expanding upon student answers, encouraging student to student discussions, or allowing other students to generate questions to their peers.
- Student portfolios consistently revealed tasks that asked them to look at text-based evidence, argumentative writing, or claim/counterclaim in ELA and content area classes. However, in many cases, students were not asked to make connections to prior themes or units, or make a deeper connection between concepts and real world application.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings: All curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards. Rigorous tasks and higher order thinking skills are consistently emphasized across subjects and grades.

Impact: Engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula have produced student discussions and student work product that is consistently college and career ready. Tasks embedded within units and lessons push thinking across subjects and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills. In a majority of classes, teachers use a workshop model that includes group process and high level group discussions. Students were consistently able to cite evidence, defend a position, and explain their thinking. In an Integrated Co-teaching math class, for example, we saw teachers using word problems that made real world connections for students. Students had to look at several different cell phone plans, look at their personal usage, choose the cheapest plan, and defend their choice to their peers, by charting their answers and showing their work. Math note books and folders reveal work designed to improve fluency and stamina.
- Content area unit and lesson plans include primary source documents, articles from scientific, professional and trade journals, and challenging text-based writing that allow students to engage with college level materials, defend a position with evidence, form a hypothesis or synthesize several sources to form a conclusion.
- Units and lesson plans in all content areas contained numerous entry points to engage all learners. Tiered problems, modified texts, opportunities for student choice, and assorted graphic organizers gave struggling students access to engaging and challenging curricula, while providing the appropriate supports to all learners. Unit plans were aligned with tasks and modules from Engage NY, and reflected the instructional shifts necessary to ensure that tasks, units and materials are Common Core Aligned.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings: The school has established a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families.

Impact: The school has built structures that support high expectations, provide a path for college and career readiness, and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has incorporated their five core values- Grit, Grace, Curiosity, Self-Management, and Social Skills, into all aspects of academic and social-emotional learning in the school. Throughout classrooms, students and teachers continually referenced the school's core values, and posters were seen hanging in every classroom that listed them. For example, When a 10th grade student gave a particularly high level answer to a question, the teacher said, "That's a great example of grit...he really grappled with the challenge and stuck with it."
- The school offers a Saturday Academy to all students. The purpose of the Saturday Academy is for Regents review, as well as providing support for students who are already on track to graduate with a Regents diploma, to have the additional support needed to get the Advanced Regents.
- Jupiter grades and transcript review workshops keep students and parents aware of progress toward graduation. The college office at the school expands access to all students by arranging college trips, having college and financial aid nights, and providing both push-in and pull-out informational sessions for students at every grade level in the school.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings: Distributive leadership structures, vertical and horizontal teacher teams are an embedded part of the structure of the school, and play a critical role in shared decision making.

Impact: The work of the teacher teams has resulted in Common Core Aligned Curricula, student progress on assessments, and improved pedagogy.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet in both vertical and horizontal structures to review units, align curricula, create common assessments, review assessment data, and look at student work. All teams use protocols, and agendas and minutes are kept and reviewed at each meeting. “Next steps” are generated for all members of the teacher teams.
- Teachers were using a tuning protocol to assess student work in the Social Studies team meeting. The teachers stayed on task, stayed true to the protocol, and engaged in a conversation that looked deeply and critically at their own pedagogy, and ways to improve their delivery of instruction.
- Grade level teams meet to plan units, plan trips and outside activities to support units, and to discuss individual student progress and performance.
- Teachers articulated that they feel respected by administration, are included on many school-based decisions, and are empowered with leadership roles within the school. The principal stated that she depends on her teachers to be leaders, and has empowered them, through shared decision-making structures, and embedded teacher team work.