



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Academy for College Preparation and Career  
Exploration: A College Board School**

**Middle – High School K382**

**911 Flatbush Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11226**

**Principal: Doris Unger**

**Date of review: December 15, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

## The School Context

Academy for College Preparation and Career Exploration: A College Board School is a middle – high school with 453 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 81% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 9% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.7%.

## 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>Celebration</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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , 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>
<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>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards including the instructional shifts. Additionally, curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data for a diversity of learners.

### Impact

Curricular alignment of tasks ensures college and career readiness is promoted for all students and that they are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- A majority of lesson plans include prerequisite skills necessary for the learning intention based on a prior lesson. In an earth science lesson plan where students are expected to identify three major plate boundaries and the theory of plate tectonics, it is stated that students should have the prerequisite knowledge of explaining how waves, wind, water, and ice shape the earth's land surface by erosion, and they should also be familiar with types of rocks and how they form. In a grade 7 math lesson plan, students are expected to be able to compare side lengths of similar triangles by using ratios. This is built on the prerequisite skills from prior lessons where students were to identify similar figures, identify corresponding side lengths and angles, identify ratios, compare ratios, and multiply and divide decimals.
- Some teachers use reflections sheets to assess the level of student learning and identify approaches to modify future instruction following a lesson. On a grade 8 science lesson reflection sheet focusing on incomplete dominance, the teacher stated they would refine the lesson the next time they teach the topic by using various colors to show key phenotypes. The teacher also stated they will incorporate this strategy into the "Do Now" in order to reinforce these ideas through the current unit. In a grade 7 science class focusing on volcanoes, a teacher noted on a reflection sheet that students were stuck understanding that volcanoes are mountains. The teacher explained that having the students draw the volcano was a strategy that led to a breakthrough, enabling them to understand that volcanoes are powerful forces related to plate boundaries.
- Administration notes they are in the process of working with the staff to adjust their curricula to embed resources from throughout New York City such as visits to parks, museums, cultural institutions, landmarks, and other sites to enhance teaching and learning. The leadership team's goal for these planned inclusions is for instruction to increase student motivation and help meet the needs of their learners. Administration also provides feedback related to lesson plan documents through constant reference of Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* on planning documents and professional development sessions.
- Staff administers a multiple intelligence inventory at the beginning of the year to frame their instruction and grouping of students. Most teachers report knowing their students are more visual learners so they plan their lessons with many images, and for those students that tend to be more kinesthetic, the teacher refines the lesson to include opportunities for them to be successful in their preferred learning style as well.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best that is identified by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

### Impact

Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- Administration and staff share the belief that including images in lesson materials and activities supports student learning. In an earth science class, the teacher referred to a plate boundaries map from the reference table for discussion amongst the students and projected the same map on the front board; however the teacher's map was not properly oriented on the white board, limiting the students' ability to interpret the findings and teacher's instructional points. In a social studies class investigating the industrial revolution, students were provided with a series of photocopied images to identify what they see and what they think is happening based on a recently learned instructional strategy, Visual Thinking Strategies, according to the teacher. Although the strategy is designed to foster a rigorous group 'problem-solving' process through teacher-facilitated discussions and improve comprehension, the images were difficult to comprehend due to the poor quality of the copies, as noted by the teacher who stated, "It is hard to see the documents." Additionally, although the teacher informed the students to work with a partner or the person next to you, once all work sheets were handed out the students worked completely independently and did not engage in any discussion.
- Throughout most classes, low-level *Depth of Knowledge* questions were asked of students to initiate class discussion or verify understanding. Additionally, the teachers would often directly repeat the student answer for the class and expand upon it. In a music history class, students were learning how Tejano music is a reflection of the United States and its diversity. During class discussion, the teacher primarily explained the connections by citing history and anecdotal stories of the musical artist being played for the class. Additionally, he generalized references to the students' knowledge of the music. However, in a special education math class, students were engaged in a discussion using a dry erase board and blocks of ten to help visualize and physically demonstrate their understanding of division. The teacher asked them, "So, what is the first thing you want to know?"
- Throughout most classes observed, group work was used to facilitate discussion, although it did not always reflect a high level of student understanding. In an English class, students read their partners' paragraph from the previous week and, using a rubric, provided a grade along with a narrative justifying the given grade. Then students discussed privately with their partners the grade they gave. In one case observed, when a partner did not understand what was wrong with her paragraph according to her partner, the teacher clarified and noted the reviewer does have some good ideas which "will only help your grade." In a few classes, students were encouraged to explain their findings to their classmates. In a grade 7 math class, the teacher asked the students to explain their work in front at the board.

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

Across classrooms teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and use them to determine student progress towards goals across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

Actionable feedback is provided to students regarding their achievement and the results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- Pupil Path, an online student management system, is used by teachers to inform students if they are doing well. Students overwhelmingly report logging on to Pupil Path to see their grades, assignments, credits and keep themselves aware of their progress and assignments.
- The English department has been trained by Teachers College at Columbia University to incorporate rubric use in alignment with state standards and expectations similar to the Regents assessments. Several students stated most of their assignments in English have rubrics and they sometimes use them to grade themselves. The students agreed the use of the rubrics by their teachers helped them investigate more and do better research. Some departments use rubrics purposefully to assess oral presentation skills or for grading science labs. Students in earth science receive graded rubrics based on their timeliness, completion, data table presentations and formatting, thoughtfulness of answers to questions, and evidence of understanding. In addition to the rubric score, anecdotal comments are written in margins, such as, "when writing your measurement, get in the habit of writing the decimal and units for distance between the foci and length of the major axis." The use of oral presentation rubrics is used to assess student delivery, content and enthusiasm towards the audience.
- Students receive detailed diagnostic profile reports on their overall performance, including domain and customized instructional supports to help them improve based on assessment data. The report informs the student what level they are performing at according to the Common Core Learning Standards, if they have tested out successfully or not, and their Lexile level. Additionally, the report details developmental analysis in a narrative for the teacher to use when assisting the student on their next steps. Specifically, the report may list benefits for instruction and practice associated with the instructional shifts. Some examples of next steps for the teacher in their instruction include: "Define cause as something that happens," "Discuss with students the different syllable patterns in the word and pronounce each syllable individually," and "Point out that readers often revise inferences as they read or gather more information."
- The staff shared they value the use of timely formative assessment data to redirect instruction and provide instant feedback based on standards and then track students who have achieved mastery. Recently, the school adopted a new software program to monitor student achievement. No results of the new system are available currently.

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness are also communicated to families.

### Impact

A system of accountability for high expectations from the administration and staff is in place and helps families understand student progress toward those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- Through a philosophy of “failure is not an option,” all students have the opportunity to enroll in an interdisciplinary leadership course designed to introduce the students to the tasks, strategies, and skills of effective leadership and to promote college readiness. The course requires students to maintain a journal, conduct reciprocal student interviews of themselves and who they will be in two years from now, and identify of a possible major, minor, and college course selection. Students from as early as grade 9 all report the leadership class helps them better understand what is necessary for success in acquiring their high school diploma and post high school options.
- Administration recognizes the need to do better on state assessments, especially math and social studies, and feels growth is attainable through a variety of new measures including focusing on better questioning and student engagement. As such, informal observations for all staff are conducted monthly by the assistant principals where constructive feedback based on prior observations is provided. Observation reports reviewed indicate specific recommendations for staff that scored at developing in Danielson *Framework for Teaching* 3b: using questioning and discussion technique. Recommendations include: “In an effort to ensure that students are being challenged to engage in critical thinking it is of paramount importance that you design questions that address the variety of proficiency levels of students in your learning environment, design instructional activities that include and require student to student discussion of topic(s) covered during your class, and refrain from answering your own questions. However, teachers who performed at a level of effective according to the *Framework for Teaching* Rubric 3b: using questioning and discussion technique, were not given any explicit feedback to facilitate their pedagogical improvement so that it may lead to a highly effective rating in the future.
- Staff members volunteer for 20-minute professional development presentations weekly during professional time. They report it is more engaging since they are learning from one another and has helped increase communication across departments and grades.
- Parents report they are made aware of their child’s progress through Schedules, the online student management system, and phone calls from staff. A few stated they felt “the school is doing a great job to ensure we know exactly how they are performing through conferences.”

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on teams that may be loosely connected to school goals. Through analysis of assessment data and student work for students, teacher teams are attempting to engage in discussions that result in improved teacher practice.

### Impact

The use of an inquiry approach is developing across the teams to make progress toward goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Much of the staff arrived considerably late for the inquiry team meeting and were not fully aware of the agenda item for discussion. Additionally, when asked to record information, all staff members did not have something to write with or write on.
- A first year teacher was assigned the role to lead the introduction of a new instructional strategy with his colleagues based on his attendance at an external workshop. The technique referred to as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), was shared to help promote professional collaboration amongst colleagues by impacting student thinking skills that could be transferred from one lesson to another. The facilitator explained students would look at one image and write down anything they “see is going on in the picture...and what they see that makes sense?” Following a few moments, the teacher facilitator asked for feedback and encouraged his colleagues to “go deeper” in a simulation of the VTS technique. The facilitator closed with stating “the most important thing is you make sure the students follow the learning objective.”
- During a discussion with the high school social studies team, they expressed their function is “to collaborate and see where we are going with the curriculum, plan and determine criteria for assessing the kids by sharing strategies.” They also noted they meet regularly to ensure they use the same projects and experiences. They explained that the impact the team has had on their instructional practice has been the sharing of ideas, including graphic organizers and other resources. Additionally, several teachers stated the team has had a positive impact on improving student achievement, although no specific evidence was provided to support the claim.
- A math teacher shared a lesson plan that was modified through communication with her team member where she was able to improve her pedagogy. The teacher stated she taught a lesson on adding and subtracting fractions and parts of land. Her colleague offered that the current lesson will not be well understood by the students as it is currently written. She suggested making it much simpler by the inclusion of two floor plans, one simple and one more complex. The teacher explained that once the unit was introduced to the students, it took a few days for conceptual understanding but was much more successful. The teacher shared that the students were able to demonstrate their understanding through their work samples.