



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Brooklyn Frontiers High School

High School K423

**112 Schermerhorn Street
Brooklyn
NY 11201**

Principal: Alona Cohen

**Date of review: February 23, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop**

The School Context

Brooklyn Frontiers High School is a high school with 177 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 0% Asian, 78% Black, 20% Hispanic and 2% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 49% students with disabilities. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 78.6%.

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	Well Developed
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	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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share.

Impact

A focus on analysis of data and shared practice result in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners, improvement in teacher practice, and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers have built a culture of professional collaboration in which they share insights relative to the coherence of teacher pedagogy, thus fostering improvement of outcomes for all learners. For example, content area teams devote significant time to lesson study during their bi-weekly Thursday meetings. The math team is focused on the Common Core Algebra Regents exam and has refined their scope and sequence resulting in 38 out of 40 students passing the last State assessment. A teacher reported, “Students are becoming the problem solvers and are taking ownership of the learning process.” Another teacher stated, “We are constantly thinking about how we’re facilitating instruction and are planning deeply. We’re focused on every little detail.”
- Teacher teams articulate how they implement structured professional collaborations using protocols and other structures to strengthen teacher capacity as they create, revise, and/or adopt curricula to ensure effective integration of the Common Core and instructional shifts into instruction across grades and content areas. Teams use Google Docs to input real-time data and strategies to share with colleagues and inform next steps for planning and meeting the needs of their students. The English Language Arts (ELA) team-sharing document included an annotation strategy, “Use two colors for annotation of the documents...consider using pink and green so that we are consistent.” Another ELA teacher comment included, “Still in the planning stage of lesson study. In the last meeting, we changed everything because it was too low for E7 class. Students have to be able to evaluate how well evidence supports a given claim.”
- Cross-departmental team meetings occur monthly and teaching staff is divided into two groups between the upper and lower grades. Each group is facilitated by a model teacher or Learning Partners team member, which allows teachers across grades and content areas to learn from each other. In review of the cross department sharing of minutes, teachers benefit from others’ lesson study processes, learning the individual teaching practices of teachers working with the same groups of students, gaining a better understanding of teacher work, and student experiences across classrooms. A science teacher shared, “I am fostering student independence as students are trying to figure out unfamiliar words. Moving forward, I will focus on self-reflection along the way in the lesson, and have additional checkpoints at the end of the lesson.”

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While pedagogy provides consistent instructional supports, questioning and discussion techniques, the strategic use of multiple entry points and extensions varies across classrooms.

Impact

Teaching strategies are not yet purposefully designed to offer high-quality supports and extensions that afford students opportunities to take ownership of their learning and engage in high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- In classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions by responding to teacher-generated questions, yet there were limited opportunities for students to question one another and problem-solve with their classmates. During an ELA lesson on characterization, teachers made an effort to include most students however, one student dominated the conversation. Teacher generated questions included, “Which adjectives still apply?”, “How was the student in the book characterized yesterday?”, and “How do we know Junior is still smart?” During a lesson on Romeo and Juliet, students were expected to analyze a character by how the playwright introduces him/her to the audience using details from the text and film. Students were provided with a film summary graphic organizer to record their observations and character tracking tool organizer, whereas some students took notes on their own and others needed a reminder from the teacher.
- In a science class, students were expected to explain how organisms inherit genetic information prompted by the launch question, “How are your genes influenced by your parents?” During the mini-lesson, teachers focused on the work of Gregor Mendel and his contribution to the field of genetics. Students were asked to record their hypothesis regarding the first generation of pea plants on worksheets. Additional worksheet questions included, “Are the alleles of the offspring dominant or recessive for green and yellow peas?” When questioned, some students were not able to define “allele” and expressed confusion around the meaning of dominant and recessive genes. Conversely, in a math lesson focused on solving linear quadratic systems graphically, students exhibited self-paced investigation, which allowed them to practice the skills learned in class and apply them to Regents-style problems. Students were given the choice to work independently, in pairs, or with one of their co-teachers. Throughout the lesson, teachers checked-in with students and consistently encouraged students to explain their thinking used to arrive at answers.
- During a social studies lesson, students worked in different stations focused on comparing and contrasting the Black Consciousness Movement to the Black Lives Matter movement focusing on themes of problems, leaders, and beliefs/goals. The students then had a whole group discussion on teacher-created questions that did not closely correlate with themes discussed such as “How many of you would choose money or the movement?”, and “Would they have been better focusing on money rather than the movement?”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Coherence across grades and subject areas promotes college and career readiness for all students. Individual and groups of students including standardized and alternately assessed students have access to the curricula and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, teachers meet regularly to discuss and make curricular adjustments. The school uses Common Core Learning Standards-aligned curricula that they modify as appropriate for their population, 49% of whom are students with disabilities. The school uses *Really Great Reading Phonics Blitz* for their students who are significantly below grade level in reading and have challenges with decoding. Additionally, in order to improve the depth of student discussion, teachers incorporate Socratic seminar into their unit and lesson plans. As stated by the principal, "In science, we've had an interesting journey. We are at a place where teachers are including questioning in their plans that is encouraging students to ask questions about the content." The principal also reports, "We've been focused on including teacher moves in our planning for the last two years." For example, a review of ELA lesson plans included checking in with specific students who tend to get easily distracted, strategic groupings of students, and incorporating various access points - film, music, and technology, specifically to support struggling readers.
- Teachers refined their math curricula after reviewing student Regents performance data and assessments at the beginning of the year. Teachers realized there was a need to include additional math interventions in Algebra, which resulted in an increase in pass rates for the June 2015 Regents exam. In ELA, teachers use Google Docs to memorialize their revisions, which focus on including integrated supports. Students were having stamina challenges and not reading long tasks initially which led to teachers including targeted podcasts in their lessons so students are introduced to the texts via audio while also increasing access to the content and their stamina.
- Teachers realized some of their lessons were being scaffolded too much and stated, "They were not rigorous enough. We were doing our students a huge disservice and not preparing them for college and career, in specific, the Regents exams." This reflection led to teachers including additional academic vocabulary and creating more authentic opportunities for student experiences and learning.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades.

Impact

Teachers and students have actionable feedback and results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers in the Social Studies department analyzed assessment data to reveal that students were not proficient at making thematic connections, while ELA teachers' analysis revealed that their students needed to improve in supporting their claims and making deep connections. Teachers used this data to inform their work on planning units focused on themes and comprehension.
- Teachers utilize the on-line assessment report, JumpRope, which makes their standards based grading practical, communicates how students are progressing in student and family friendly language, and informs which instructional shifts teachers are focused on in their respective classrooms. Teachers get their data reports every three weeks and conference with students to share results and areas of growth and challenge. Students report, "We work with teachers to create new goals based on our benchmark data." "I even know when I've met my goals before I meet with my teacher meets with me because I'm able to go on-line and check myself."
- The school participates in the Transfer School Common Core Institute with one of their focus areas being analyzing student work to ensure grading is consistent amongst teachers and meeting standards. This analysis has resulted in teachers developing rubrics and instruction that is based on strategy and problem solving rather than on tasks that require students to focus on getting a correct answer without requiring explanation of their rationale.
- A review of student work included feedback such as "This is perfection! I really enjoyed reading your essay and seeing the strength of your writing style. I can see how you pulled pieces from our earlier lessons and used transitions to make them flow in your paper." Additional feedback to a student on a French assignment included, "Rely on your notes and your own thought process, not on-line translations or a dictionary. Next steps - don't hesitate to ask questions. Doing that is a great thing, it's nothing to be scared about."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability that ensures all students own their educational experience and are prepared for their individual and appropriate next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders meet with the faculty frequently and there is an expectation that everyone participates in the success of their students. The principal stated, "If I'm the only one doing the work, the school is not going to move forward." Teachers concur and have created a culture where peer-to-peer feedback is essential and welcomed. The focus on lesson study has promoted discussions amongst teacher teams to ensure their students are ready for college and career options especially considering their population enters the school two years behind a typical grade nine student.
- As a Learning To Work school, students are encouraged to participate in internships as soon as they begin their freshman year. All participants have on-site mentors in addition to the support of a school based internship coordinator who meets with them weekly to explore their progress and areas of challenge. Students who have the option of accelerating their graduation are encouraged to enroll in Cooperative Tech high school for Career Technical Education certifications in vocational industries such as building trades, health careers, information technology and service industries.
- Students report they are being prepared for college because of the heavy focus on research papers in ELA. "The citing of evidence and MLA formatting is driving me crazy but I know it will help me in John Jay College," stated a senior student. Another student, who plans to be a principal, had a roadmap that she developed with her college coordinator. She stated, "I'm going to be a paraprofessional first and then work my way to becoming a principal." The school has coaches who meet and work with students to coordinate their goals, to monitor their progress, and to use their graduation trackers via Google Docs, which has led to students developing post-secondary plans.
- Students travel on overnight college trips where they tour college campuses and meet with current college students in order to expose them to experiences after high school. The principal states, "The majority of our students have been told in the past that they are not college material. The goals of this trip are to expose them to college life and show them that college is a realistic, feasible possibility for them."