



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

School for Democracy and Leadership

Middle - High School K533

**600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: James Olearchik

**Date of review: February 26, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop**

The School Context

The School for Democracy and Leadership is a middle-high school with 295 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 0% Asian, 89% Black, 8% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 24% students with disabilities. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 87.9%.

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	Celebration	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	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning 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 so that individual and groups of students, including the lowest- and highest achieving students, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school revised its literacy curriculum to ensure that it is cognitively engaging and rigorous for all students considering the needs of their population who range from significantly below grade level to above grade level. School leadership and faculty decided to incorporate Scholastic's *Read 180* digital texts into their planning to ensure access for a variety of learners. Teachers report they are seeing improvements in reading comprehension with their students who are using the program both academically and in confidence levels. Teachers and school leadership also commented on seeing an improvement in student reading stamina as a result of this addition to the curricula.
- Teachers meet three times a week to plan curricula and are given feedback from administration before they move on to their next units. The school intentionally and strategically paired teachers by content areas and this has had a positive impact on the effectiveness of modifications of teacher unit and lesson planning and on the development of mastery tasks, as mentioned by the principal.
- Teachers and school content coaches realized they needed to refine the English Language Arts (ELA) scope and sequence to meet the needs of their students, in particular, the high school student population, to ensure alignment with the Common Core. During the summer, teachers revised their plans and now have a much clearer structure and use the resources of *EngageNY* to support their instruction. In geometry and algebra, the school uses curricula from the Institute for Student Achievement. In science, teachers work with a coach to insert Next Generation Science Standards, which have included incorporating engineering practices and crosscutting concepts, which provide students with connections, and intellectual tools that are related across content areas and enrich their application of practices and understanding of core ideas.
- The school has a high mid-year student entry enrollment and the faculty decided to adjust the curricula in order to focus on thematic units. The curricula coaches and staff made these changes so that a student's arrival to the school would not hinder either their learning or that of students who have been enrolled since the start of the school year.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* are becoming aligned to curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. However, teaching strategies do not always provide multiple entry points nor fully engage all students in appropriately challenging tasks.

Impact

Implementation of teaching strategies does not consistently provide multiple entry points, leading to uneven student engagement and limited evidence of critical thinking on the part of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The faculty believes students learn best when they are engaged in meaningful real world tasks that are reflective, relevant, engaging, and built around relationships. Increased instructional time has enabled teachers to differentiate further their instruction. For example, students in a science class were in different groups and were assigned different questions to answer with their peers based on their appropriate levels. Questions included, “How do you analyze data?” and “Explain what you should do once you have collected your qualitative and quantitative data (observations and measurements)”. Another group was tasked with answering, “What are you looking for when you look at the measurements and observations you have collected?” This class included students with disabilities who were working in groups, individually on the computer, or in pairs. The paraprofessionals were also integrated into the lesson and worked with their assigned and unassigned students. In a math class, students worked on rotating a figure about a given point of rotation a given number of degrees in a prescribed direction. When asked to explain the lesson’s objective, some students were not able to explain or demonstrate their thinking or apply it to real world concepts and all students were working on the same task.
- In a social studies class, the learning objective focused on students analyzing an ancient Greek myth, determining the theme and identifying evidence to support the theme. During the lesson, students worked on a Do Now activity that did not connect to the lesson’s objective. While the Do Now piqued student interest, the alignment to the lesson was unclear. The Do Now stated, “Children usually follow their parents’ examples and not their advice. Copy the quote and explain its meaning.” During the lesson, when the reviewer asked students the meaning of “myth”, one group did not know the definition and tried to guess while another group who didn’t know the definition obtained a dictionary to look for the meaning.
- In a literacy class, students were tasked with identifying selection and deflection in a documentary photo essay and using evidence to support their opinion. During the lesson, students rotated in small groups to stations, each consisting of a different Gordon Parks photo. They were asked to note their responses on a post-it to the questions, “What do they objectively see?”, “What does the photo make you think?”, and “How does the photo make you feel?” The teacher included an article from the New York Times, however, the questioning during the whole class discussion remained at a low-level and the opportunity for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking was limited.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

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

Impact

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

Supporting Evidence

- The school leadership team realized teachers needed support in giving formative feedback to students and stated, "They were giving summative feedback and were also very good at giving informal feedback." Teachers continue to deepen their understanding of revision and giving quality feedback on student work so students have multiple opportunities to improve. A review of some student work noted, "Good evidence," while some work included actionable feedback such as, "Great examples! Your explanations however, are lacking some key details. Next time, only choose a few examples and be sure to fully explain how plate movement causes that to happen."
- The school's assessment data revealed students were not completing their projects and the principal stated, "We learned that stamina was a big challenge for our students and this is where the importance of relationships is very important for our students." The school looked at mock Regents data and this informed teacher instructional decisions. The leadership team agreed this also informed their work of checking-in with teachers to ensure data and assessments were being utilized to adjust curricular decisions and instruction. The data also revealed students were passing courses and not passing Regents exams, which unearthed many questions for the faculty, in particular, ELA, which led to the refinement of the curricula during the summer.
- Teachers reported they use data checks and look at progress report data to decide what their instructional foci will be during planning and lessons. As a school community, they decided based on the data that students needed increased annotation strategies and building of academic vocabulary. They also use the data to group students and based on their groupings, determine the strategies students need. As a result, the school saw an increase in the percentage of students scoring 75% and above on the January ELA Regents exam.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff, provide training and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

There is a system of accountability among the majority of the school staff. Ongoing feedback is provided to help families understand student progress toward meeting the expectations of college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a 60-page staff handbook, which explicitly explains school-wide expectations and how the staff will be held accountable including progress report due dates, grading policies, the role of the paraprofessional, and co-teaching expectations. The school also utilizes Google calendar and a weekly memo to foster a culture of transparency as some observations are announced. Some staff members stated they would like to see an increased level of support and accountability from school leadership so the school can benefit from a system of mutual accountability.
- Teachers communicate to parents as often as necessary, with some parents stating it happens on a weekly or sometimes daily basis. This information is captured in Skedula, which parents access and utilize. The school increased the number of progress reports distributed from four to eight per year, and report card distribution from two to four. Faculty engages families during grade orientations at the beginning of the school year in September and in May to discuss end-of-year expectations.
- A parent commented, "AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] is a wonderful program that is helping our children with note-taking and organization skills and it has helped my child tremendously." Another parent noted the partnership that the school has with the Posse Foundation, which offers a comprehensive college access and youth leadership development program. She added that they are helping to prepare students to become marketable and ready for college. All parents in attendance agreed that the principal has a hands-on approach to working with students and he knows all of their names and works hard to build relationships with them while also holding them accountable with their academics.
- A parent of a student with disabilities reported, "My son is in a self-contained middle school class and he has received support since his first day at the school and because of his hard work and the school's, he is being mainstreamed in math. I am sad that he will have to go to a different school because the high school does not have the self-contained supports he will need."

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

The instructional capacity of teachers is strengthening, resulting in progress for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Middle school teachers agreed that *Read 180* has had an impact on their students and has deepened their team's conversation regarding strategies and support for their struggling readers. "We are trying different things. We're pulling them out for targeted support and we see how this is making a difference." Academic vocabulary is a focus for the school and teachers spoke to the use of monitoring student usage of content specific vocabulary and chunking text passages. Teachers noted the focus on annotation has also yielded student gains and they are seeing improvements in relation to students underlining key words and phrases.
- Teachers' inquiry work includes looking at data checks per grade and across subgroups, which informs teacher strategies and student interventions on a monthly basis. A grade 9 data check during the fall and winter semesters presented which content areas the student either passed or failed using a color coding system, general supports, interventions, and concerns. Based on the student data, teachers use a protocol entitled, *Evaluating Current Strategies in Use* to determine how strategies are meeting student learning targets and any gaps in the strategies being used.
- Teacher teams and school leadership are in the process of increasing student mastery of goals. The principal's goal is to push teacher thinking and discussion, focused on using Lexile levels to inform the types and rigor of selected texts, and using this data to capture student progress each semester. The school began this process last spring with some of their middle school teachers.