



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Brooklyn College Academy

High School K555

**350 Coney Island Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11218**

Principal: Nicholas Mazarella

**Date of review: January 12, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart**

The School Context

Brooklyn College Academy is a high school with 596 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 7% Asian, 68% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 5% White students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners and 8% students with disabilities. Boys account for 36% of the students enrolled and girls account for 64%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.9%.

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	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	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

All teachers engage in inquiry-based collaborations that strengthen their instructional capacity and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are embedded across all grades and content areas.

Impact

There is schoolwide instructional coherence with high levels of achievement and teachers play an integral role in decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a volunteer Learning Leaders team that identifies potential topics that may support the school's instructional mission. They research the topic and after reflection and consideration of the need and resources available, they determine if it should be presented to the staff. This team determined that the schoolwide grade reporting system needed to be revised to allow teachers to report marking period grades above 85 in unit increments instead of increments of five.
- Teachers participate in a peer review process with their colleagues that involves intervisitations, debriefings, and a culminating fishbowl presentation at the end of the year. According to the school's peer review process handbook, experienced, successful teachers are viewed as a "gifted source of inspiration and knowledge" as they collaborate to improve instructional practices across the school.
- Teachers noted that they share the minutes of their meetings with each other and the school leaders through an online site. They said that the feedback they get from the school leaders helps them determine the next steps they will take in their inquiry process.
- Although this school has two sites, the main site for ninth and tenth grade students, and the other on the campus of Brooklyn College for juniors and seniors, teacher teams represent the entire school and include members from both sites. One team was observed following a protocol to review several rubrics and feedback forms that had been developed by members of the team to determine their effectiveness and whether and how they might be revised. One teacher noted that she incorporated a checklist of frequently used comments on one feedback form to make it easier and more efficient to give targeted feedback to students. Other teachers commented that they liked the feedback form that allowed multiple students to give feedback to each other and that they planned to implement the practice themselves.
- Teachers at both sites participate in the hiring of new pedagogical staff. All candidates conduct a demonstration lesson for students and staff who provide feedback on the candidate to the principal. In addition, more experienced teachers mentor all new teachers during their first year at the school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teachers use common assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. However, the results of these assessments are not always used to offer a clear picture of student progress toward meeting their goals.

Impact

Students receive actionable feedback on their work and teachers make instructional adjustments to address the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create common assessments in courses that culminate in a Regents examination, such as Global History and Geography, and base them on prior State tests. Feedback to students is consistent with the State rubrics. Most students indicated they set goals for themselves, but there is not always a clear connection between these goals and the assessment practices of the school as results are not always tracked with respect to meeting these goals.
- While most work is assessed according to a rubric, occasionally the feedback to the student is not consistent with the rubric. For example, some bulletin boards displayed work that was marked using a percentage out of a hundred, when the rubric indicated a standards-based evaluation using levels one through four. Occasionally, displayed student work contained obvious errors that were not noted in teacher feedback.
- Although students indicated that most of the college coursework they do is not usually marked according to a rubric, they do use rubrics routinely in their high school courses. One student explained that she had been struggling with writing and knew that the college courses she was preparing to take would require stronger writing skills. She said she worked with her teacher to understand how to use the task rubrics to help her improve her writing and added, "Now I use the rubric to see what I need to do to make it better."
- Teachers review and revise curricula, assessments, and rubrics in teacher teams after evaluating student work. Some teachers are tracking student progress and sharing results of common assessments, including those of students with disabilities, across classes, but this practice is not widespread among all teachers.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Curricula across all content areas are aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts in rigorous academic tasks. Higher-order skills are emphasized and embedded in a coherent way across grades.

Impact

Students successfully complete college-level courses and must demonstrate high levels of thinking in all of their work, both in high school and college courses.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders make strategic decisions to provide opportunities for all students to accelerate high school credit accumulation in order to take college courses at Brooklyn College. For example, students take four terms of global history in one year and their English course work prepares them for the English Regents exam in tenth grade.
- Teachers prepare lesson plans using a common teacher-developed template that explicitly references the alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. They often collaborate to develop curricular resources that will complement each other's instruction, such as including Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 5, *Reformation Symphony*, in a unit of study on the reformation.
- Lesson plans are reviewed during the cycle of observation. Most teachers use a template that outlines the objectives, resources and materials, content and Common Core Learning Standards, grouping, differentiation strategies, and the assessment plan. Teachers include higher-order questions and vocabulary in their lesson plans. For example, one lesson plan indicates that students will focus on the question of how racial bias shapes lives.
- Unit and lesson planning uses a backward design process by starting with the standards that need to be addressed, and planning backward to identify the strategies that will meet the needs of the students. Curriculum maps outline specific standards in each content area, called "power standards," that will be addressed throughout the units of study. Teachers noted that having the standards outlined in the curriculum maps helps them ensure that content is not repeated or neglected as student progress from one course to the next.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and provide high quality supports for all students. Student discussions reflect high levels of thinking and ownership of their learning.

Impact

All students engage in challenging tasks and demonstrate higher order thinking skills in high school and college-level courses.

Supporting Evidence

- Classroom instructional strategies include a variety of ways for students to approach the curricula through challenging and rigorous tasks. In one class, students held a Socratic seminar on the topic of good parenting. Participants engaged in a lively student-led discussion that included references to cultural differences in child rearing and discipline. In a science class with both general education students and students with disabilities, groups of students studied the theory of continental drift by analyzing evidence from maps of glacial deposits and fossil discoveries. Students in a government class were analyzing evidence in a murder trial.
- Teachers provide opportunities for students to engage with the material according to their current skill level. For example, in a math lesson students were grouped according to their prior knowledge as they worked on problems involving arithmetic series. The first level group was finding next elements in a series, the second level group was determining if a graph represented an arithmetic series, and the third level involved solving for an unknown value in an algebraic expression.
- Students cite text references and make personal connections in class discussions. In one class discussion, a student said that often the American dream is thought to be about acquiring cars, property, or a house. He then shared that his parents had come to this country to make a better life for their children. Students discussed how they coordinate their college courses so they will have the prerequisite credits to take more advanced courses.
- Students indicated that they are successful in their college classes because of the content and skills they learn in their high school classes. They said their teachers helped them learn to manage their time, plan ahead to complete assignments independently, research topics at the college library, and communicate properly through email to professors. Some students stated that their advisory teachers are always available for advice to support them in their college classes.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leaders establish a culture of high expectations for student achievement at both the high school and college levels that is communicated to students and their families. The staff provides strong supports in partnership with families for all students as they progress in meeting those expectations.

Impact

Students own their educational experience and are prepared for college work.

Supporting Evidence

- Staff, students and teachers described this school as a “no-nonsense” type of high school. Students enroll in the school in order to progress quickly to college-level work. The expectation that all students will take college courses beginning in grade 10 is communicated in the recruitment and enrollment process. The first meeting with incoming students and parents includes a college orientation component. According to the June, 2015 *College Access & Success Report* of the Middle College National Consortium, 98% of grade 12 students at this school took college courses, had an average cumulative grade point average of 3.29 and earned 24.6 college credits.
- Every year in June, the guidance staff holds a meeting with all students, by grade, to inform them and their families about the expectations for the coming year. Most teachers communicate expectations for their students through a contract that parents and students sign. There is specific communication about the shift from the main campus to the college campus that occurs at the beginning of grade 11.
- A parent stated that knowing her child is successfully completing college coursework has helped her accept that her child is ready to go away to college. Parents agreed that they are well informed about the expectations for their children to take college-level courses and that they are also expected to help their children be successful. One parent added that the school “makes you be a partner, whether you like it or not.” An announcement for a meeting of parents of incoming seniors states, “Your child’s success this year will depend on collaboration between you and the school.”