



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Olympus Academy

High School K635

**755 East 100 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

Principal: Bruce Gonzales

**Date of review: May 5, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

The School Context

Olympus Academy is a high school with 172 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 88% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 23% students with disabilities. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 79.0%.

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	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 <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	Developing
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:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and teachers ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, State standards, and the instructional shifts. In addition, learning tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits.

Impact

Curricular decisions build coherence and promote college and career readiness, as all students have access to rigorous and engaging tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Across subject areas, curriculum maps are developed to build coherence by requiring teachers to cite enduring understandings, essential questions, relevant Common Core Learning Standards, guiding questions, what students will know and what they will be able to do.
- Lesson planning documents from two different English Language Arts (ELA) courses emphasized close reading strategies intended to engage students in complex text as well as writing while using evidence from sources to inform or make an argument. According to one plan, students would use annotation to read for importance. In addition, they were to decide whether they agree or disagree with the author and justify their opinions. The other lesson plan focused on the annotation of the various examples of literary devices found in a text. The analysis of the text would result in students having to explain in writing how the literary device that they feel is the strongest shows the central idea of the story.
- A science lesson plan would have students engage in a hands-on activity as they worked to understand diffusion and osmosis. Eggs would be dropped into different solutions and observations recorded. After completing a data table, students would develop hypotheses explaining the movement of water molecules across the semi-permeable membrane of an egg through a solution.
- A math lesson plan in solving linear systems by graphing started with having students finding x and y intercepts and identifying ordered pairs after being provided with incomplete equations. Higher-order skills were required to address the reflection section, which asked students to explain in writing how to solve a linear system by graphing, what the graph would look like, and if systems of that type could be solved without graphing them.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Although teaching practices across classrooms are aligned to the curricula, they are just beginning to reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. In addition, across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Students do not consistently demonstrate higher-order thinking skills or produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership identified questioning and discussion, with a focus on increased student-to-student interaction, as their core belief in how students learn best. However, instructional practices that reflect this belief were inconsistent across classrooms visited. In addition, many of the questions posed during instruction were not rigorous.
- In a social studies class, the teacher asked a series of low-level questions such as, “What did the swastika represent to the Jews; something good or something bad?”, “What’s monotheistic mean?” and “Can you give me two examples of an absolute monarchy that you’ve learned about so far?” There was little opportunity for students to reconcile these ideas with the larger concepts and themes of the unit. In addition, students directed their mostly one-word responses to the teacher and not to the class as a whole so that peers might respond. Similarly, during the active instruction of a math lesson, the teacher posed a number of process oriented low-level questions, such as, “What operation do you think we have to use to find the x value?” and “What common error did he do?” Although there was an expectation that students discuss with one another as the teacher said, “Talk it out”, and “Talk to each other,” these opportunities did not result in students engaging each other in high-level thinking.
- A science lesson presented students with a high interest topic involving poisons and toxicity. The teacher defined Lethal Dose 50 (LD50) as a standard measure of toxicity and made quick references to chemicals that were familiar to students. An opportunity was missed to make connections or leverage students’ prior knowledge before having them start the learning activity which was to identify the LD50 for various chemicals as well as where they can be found. While engaged in this activity, it was noted that in a number of cases, students merely copied information from the packets of peers.
- During an ELA lesson focused on annotation skills, the teacher read aloud and stopped periodically to prompt students to strategically identify lines in the text that addressed literary devices. However, the teacher did much of the crucial thinking in the lesson, as she made most of the connections such as, “What change in mood do you see now?”, “We went from happy to frightened, right?” and “I want you to make note of that.”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms, assessment practices are aligned with the school's curricula, however they inconsistently reflect the ongoing use of checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Students and teachers receive limited feedback regarding student achievement. Teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Students noted that although they are familiar with rubrics, teachers use them most of the time instead of the students using rubrics as tools for self and peer assessment. Given the work that they brought to share, none could produce an example where they had evaluated their own work.
- Students agreed that they receive feedback in all subject areas. However, while reviewing some of their work samples, their ability to speak clearly about feedback regarding why they did well or how they could improve was inconsistent. In sharing a science assignment that had a check on it, a student said, "I'm pretty sure I did it right." A student discussing an ELA assignment said that the teacher told her that she needed to add more to it.
- Comments found on student work varied in their effectiveness in communicating clear, actionable next steps for students. They included "conclusion must be longer", "You could have explained the model much more clearly", and "Include how an author might portray a character." Others noted were "Remember we use STEAL – speech, thoughts, effects on others, actions, and looks" and "Just make sure you explain the literary element in more detail for readers who may not know what it means."
- During instruction, most teachers circulated during independent or small group work to support the efforts of their students. For example, in two different classes, teachers reminded individual students of annotation expectations as the students read. However, teachers were inconsistent in their use of observations while circulating to make effective adjustments to the planned lesson to address student misunderstandings in order to meet all of their learning needs.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

School staff regularly communicates with families regarding student progress and high expectations. Teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations and offer ongoing feedback and supports to students.

Impact

Parents have an understanding of their children’s progress on a path to college and career readiness. Students engage in experiences that prepare them for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s Parent/Student Handbook communicates a number of the expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness. It outlines credit and point accumulation, as well as requirements to earn both Regents and Advanced Regents diplomas. The handbook notes the role of senior advisors, whose job is to focus on preparing twelfth graders to achieve their post-graduation goals and aspirations through personal, academic, career, admissions and financial readiness. The “Who Can Help” page shows whom students and parents can go to for questions regarding grades, college information, working papers or jobs as well as other inquiries.
- Parents agree that the school’s staff is responsive to their inquiries regarding their children’s academic standing and that they also receive calls from counselors who keep them abreast of any issues that may hinder their children’s progress toward graduating on time.
- A review of log entries of conversations between students and advocate counselors indicates how the school documents discussions regarding students’ progress toward graduation, post-secondary goals, the college application process and financial aid. One entry showed a student’s interest in going to a two-year college for nursing and then transferring to a four-year institution. The counselor mentioned that the student understood that she had to improve her average and that it was going to be hard. The counselor noted that she would continue to follow up with the student regarding goals and academics.
- Internships are available through the school’s Learning-to-Work Program. Over a dozen businesses and organizations teach students skills in childcare, youth development, counseling, and husbandry. A student participant in the internship program noted that she is learning how to be responsible in ways that are different from being a student.

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

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributive leadership structures are in place across the school.

Impact

Collaborative work strengthens the instructional capacity of teachers, and supports the implementation of the Common Core and instructional shifts. Teachers have a voice in school decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- An ELA teacher team meeting focused on the analysis of student writing. It consisted of a review of the writing task, a reminder of how the expected outcomes from the task aligned to the team’s inquiry work regarding argumentative writing, a clear protocol for looking at student work and time to articulate actionable next steps. During the observed portion of the meeting, teachers discussed students’ abilities to establish claims, use language in a fluid fashion, organize their writing, and cite evidence.
- The math department used a data analysis protocol after administering a mock Regents’ exam. Based on notes from the meeting, they initially described the data and then they interpreted it. One interpretation was that students did not consistently use the Pythagorean Theorem when appropriate. Another realization was that students confused the concepts of intersection and union. After analyzing data, the team developed goals and an action plan that informed instructional practices. The plan included problem solving strategies, calculator tips, and vocabulary skills.
- Teachers initiated the team inter-visitation system. Notes from such collegial visits show low inference observations, areas of instructional strengths and challenges, as well as effective practices for adoption in other classes.
- Teachers stated that the staff has input and provides feedback on most major decisions. School leadership and teachers collaboratively wrote the staff handbook. The growing use of Google classroom across grades and subject areas for both assessment and as a tool for organizing student performance data has been teacher driven since its introduction to colleagues by a math teacher last year.