



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**Brooklyn Democracy Academy**

**High School K643**

**985 Rockaway Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11212**

**Principal: Andrew Brown**

**Date of review: April 12, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Gary Knight**

## The School Context

Brooklyn Democracy Academy is a high school with 210 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 84% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 65.2%.

## 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>Additional Findings</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>Proficient</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

The school leader consistently communicates high expectations to the entire staff, and provides training for those expectations. The school leader and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

The school leader's consistency in communicating high expectations has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability for those expectations. The school leader and staff successfully partner with families to support student progress toward those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school leader's expectation is that through effective instruction students will be engaged in writing and working to improve their overall academic skill set. In an effort to further reinforce high expectations, the entire staff revisited the transfer school's mission of helping students realize their full potential while they become academically and socially equipped to succeed in college and career. The staff playing an active role in revisiting the mission statement has helped with mutual accountability. High expectations are infused throughout professional collaborations and teachers follow up with each other, via peer observation and feedback, to ensure consistency and follow through. For example, as part of a team objective, staff had to create mission statements with partners who have different job responsibilities that relate to and drive the vision.
- The school leader consistently communicates high expectations to the staff in several ways including emails, one-on-one meetings, observations and feedback, and through professional development sessions. The school's professional development plan includes a communication plan for administrative expectations that addresses lesson study as a vehicle to provide expectations of rigorous instruction and to help continue to build vision. The lesson study uses the concept of Critical Friends, a structured process for giving and receiving feedback to improve a piece of work, to deepen reflective practice. Additional professional development topics include the power of student discussion and the use of quick-writes.
- The school leader and staff communicate with families via Skedula, an online interactive grading platform, and partner with families for college application workshops. A needs assessment survey is also provided to families to elicit input in the crafting of future workshops and activities. In addition to the Parent Teacher Association and the School Leadership Team, and to further partnership efforts with families, the school has a Parent Involvement Family Engagement (PIFE) team, which consists of school staff and parents. This team meets regularly to discuss school culture, best practices, how to measure success and strategies for building community.
- During the parent meeting, one parent stated that the school pushes, "and when [the child] comes home, I push!" Another parent shared that the administration is open to families presenting ideas. For example, parents led the campaign for students to get identification cards.

## Area of Focus

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

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

### Impact

Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts. All learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products; however, there were missed opportunities to push critical thinking further throughout lessons.

### Supporting Evidence

- Lessons included instructional shifts such as citing evidence from text, academic vocabulary, integrating multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats in order to make informed decisions, and developing a claim and counter with supporting evidence. For example, an English lesson expected students to read document based questions and analyze primary source documents to make a claim about the impact of the Brooklyn Navy Yard on Brooklyn's economy and society during WWII, citing text based evidence to support their claim.
- The teachers believe that students learn best when they are provided rigorous instruction that engages the learner and equips the learner to be successful. To that end, teachers' lessons in classes visited included scaffolds such as graphic organizers, sentence starters and writing prompts. For example, a Global Studies class visited provided students sentence starters to help engage and encourage helpful feedback during partner work. Some examples of sentence starters provided were, "Your details are..," "It is clear that you...," and "You displayed some analytical ideas when you stated..."
- Differentiation was observed in classes. In a U.S. History class, teachers conferred and guided some students with group and independent work. English Language Learners (ELLs) had instructions reworded and students were monitored for accuracy in their ability to verbalize tasks. Students with disabilities were provided specific supports including having information re-read to them, modeling of task and re-direction. In an Algebra class, there was intentional grouping of students based on ability. This was also the only class that provided students with extensions to the lesson by having additional problems for students to solve should they complete assigned task. Elsewhere, there were missed opportunities for students' to engage in more high-level thinking.
- Although scaffolds were provided during lessons, there were missed opportunities, in a few classes, to encourage students to think critically. For example, in a class on Latin culture, the teacher posed questions such as, "How can poetry explore the issues of the border differently than a news article or other game of writing?", and "If you had to choose an experience in your life to write a book of poetry about, what experience would you choose and why?" However, students responded with "my mother", "a teen in New York", and "gang violence", when addressing the second question. No additional questions were asked to promote higher order thinking.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The School leader and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, integrate the instructional shifts and make purposeful decisions to build coherence. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

### Impact

The school's curricula promote college and career readiness for all students. Higher order skills are emphasized across grades for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curricula documents reviewed consistently included the specific Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts being addressed for all performance tasks. A cycle English Language Arts document plans for students to cite evidence to prove their reasons in short answers responses by making claims using specific textual evidence addressing Common Core Learning Standards to include CCRA.5 and CCRA. 6.
- The school's uses a Common Core/Danielson Framework Aligned Lesson planning template for math. A unit plan document has students finding the area of right triangles, other triangles, special quadrilaterals, and polygons by composing into rectangles or decomposing into triangles and other shapes. Students then must apply these techniques in the context of solving real-world and mathematical problems. Academic vocabulary is also addressed within.
- Teachers plan curricula and lessons together. In addition, the school has three model teachers that along with the school leaders, helped to design lesson studies in which teachers engage. This encourages collegiality and cohesiveness. The school has also partnered with Learning Partners that provides professional development and support to staff regarding curricula planning.
- The teachers use Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels and DOK question stems as a measure of rigor when for planning higher order thinking lessons and tasks. Higher-order thinking is also infused throughout the curricula documents through the inclusion of essential and guided questions. For example, an Integrated Algebra curricula document has the following overarching essential questions related to the big ideas of the unit: How is the order of operations similar to government and laws? And how can I decide which problem-solving strategy is most effective for a situation, and how to apply it algebraically?
- Additional higher-order thinking through essential questioning was evidenced in all content areas. An Ecology unit plan poses the following questions: How does energy flow through ecosystems? What factors determine how populations grow? How have humans influenced the biodiversity of Earth's ecosystem? And how can humans both negatively and positively impact the environment.

<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. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

### **Impact**

The assessment practices provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Assessment results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The teachers assess students in a multitude of ways including benchmarks, quick writes, which are used for baseline, midline and end-line student data, mock Regents, and project-based activities. The criteria by which students are graded are based on the school's grading policy, which is: 30% assessments, 30% notebook, 20% engagement and 20% homework.
- Teachers use various forms of rubrics. There is a school-wide rubric for quick writes. In addition, the teachers also use subject-specific rubrics for math, art, social studies and science. Teachers provide rubric-aligned actionable feedback to students regarding achievement. Examples of feedback include: "explain using details, examples", "expand conclusion by summarizing theme as well as being more analytical, evaluative and descriptive." Feedback written on a science rubric read, "Let's work on organizing your writing using complete sentences."
- Common assessments are used to measure student progress on Regents exams and quick writes as evidenced by a tracker used by teachers. Student outcomes in content, vocabulary and conventions on baseline, midline and end line assessment are captured, and next instructional steps are determined for each student. The tracker also allows for teachers to reflect on any factors that may have impacted outcomes. For example, on a baseline quick write assessment, a lower performing student scored a 1 in content, vocabulary and conventions. The next instructional steps were for the student to work on citing evidence from text, utilizing content vocabulary and completing assignments. The same student scored a 2 in all areas on a midline quick write assessment with some of the next steps identified as helping with identifying the main idea, fully grasping the proper use of conjunctions, and working on not creating too many run-ons. Data is tracked in a similar fashion for the U.S. History Regents with score, comments and next steps.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity.

**Impact**

The inquiry based professional collaborations have resulted in the instructional capacity of teachers being strengthened. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school has various teams including interdisciplinary teacher teams that conduct inquiry-based conversations regarding students’ quick write data, examining what the data is telling them and developing strategies together that will help students to further develop skills in the areas identified as deficits. Teachers shared that the team structures have allowed for all departments to come together and share ideas. As one teacher stated, “I’ve never experienced this before; we are constantly learning.” Another teacher said, “It allows us to evaluate and reflect on our practices.”
- An interdepartmental meeting with economics, English, math and history teachers was observed where teachers were analyzing assessment data, student work and evaluating students’ quick writes. The work from three students that the teachers had in common was targeted for the inquiry process. The student work centered on identifying claims, reasons, evidence and explanation. Teachers charted what they learned from looking at student work and articulated next steps such as providing a mentor text, and providing examples of quick writes that are high-level and low-level for students to analyze and discern the details of each quick write that determine the scores at various levels.
- Distributed leadership is evident. Some examples include teacher-led, school-wide professional development workshops and team meetings, and the school-wide lesson study protocol and practices that are spearheaded by three model teachers. In addition, the quick write rubric and subject specific-rubrics were developed by teachers.