



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Tag Young Scholars

K-8 School M012

**240 East 109 Street
Manhattan
NY 10029**

Principal: Janette Cesar

**Date of review: April 19, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Clarence Williams**

The School Context

Tag Young Scholars is a K-8 school with 563 students from grade kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 34% Asian, 25% Black, 19% Hispanic, and 15% White students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners and 5% students with disabilities. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 96.6%.

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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts. Across the vast majority of classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking participation, and ownership.

Impact

Student-centered lessons are emphasized throughout the school. All students produce meaningful work products and demonstrate ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- All classrooms visited demonstrated teaching practices that exemplify the school's belief that students learn best in a student-centered environment where they take ownership of their work and work products. An example was seen in a grade 7 science class lesson on the nervous system. The learning target was: "I can explain and analyze the social learning theory's impact on human development." Students engaged in a discussion topic of their choice, which was voted on in a previous lesson, discussing pros and cons regarding the effects of video games on the brain, citing the textual evidence to build on their argument. Students raised points such as "Video games help get jobs." and "The text shows that you can lose yourself in video games and not have a social life." As students engaged in discussion, the instructor walked around the room observing student engagement.
- In all classrooms observed, teachers exemplified the elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* component of communication. For example, a math teacher discussed with students how to solve multi-step problems by going over the strategy and thought process involved. Students had different roles in their groups, which consisted of a paraphraser, a converter, an equation creator, an illustrator, and a double checker. The teacher modeled each of their roles for them to prepare them for small group work. The instructor also encouraged students throughout the lesson, while monitoring progress.
- The principal stated that their beliefs on how students learn best support the instructional practice of peer-to-peer learning. Various forms of this were evident in all classes observed. In a grade 8 English class, students discussed the book *The Gathering*. They discussed the role that culture plays in forming an identity and how words can convey either a positive or negative connotation, based on their context. Students agreed and disagreed with their peers throughout the lesson without being prompted to do so. Another example was seen in a grade 8 Spanish class. Students participated in a role-play where they had to act as waiter and patron in a restaurant using Spanish. The patron asked about the menu in Spanish and the waiter responded in Spanish. Students helped each other with difficult words and phrases.

Area of Focus

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused, however teacher teams do not systematically analyze key elements of their work. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity.

Impact

Teacher teamwork results in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- A teacher team was observed discussing grade 6 students that were struggling with math number sense. As a team, they had previously decided to meet on Wednesdays to build lessons and analyze student performance. They looked at how students understand the use of variables in mathematical expressions and how they used expressions and formulas to solve problems. The team then created a math enrichment program to target specific students from the grade level.
- A kindergarten to grade 4 vertical team was observed tackling the question “What supports, other than close reading, can I provide for my students?” Team members assumed the roles of presenting educator, facilitator, documenter, researcher, and participants. The team identified that a student was struggling with inferences and a suggestion was made to use a graphic organizer that allows the student to use visuals while citing text-based evidence. One teacher suggested the use of more questioning techniques and turn and talk during instruction, as well.
- The Response to Intervention team has documented improvements in instruction for a student who was having a challenge staying on task and retaining information. The student was not confident that she could produce a concise piece of literature. Over the course of a month, the team observed the student daily. In February of 2016, the goal was to have the student produce literary content on demand. The team assisted in providing recommended interventions such as moving the student to work with a higher-level student, involving the parents in the process, using verbal praise, and teaching the student how to modify opinion writing in a condensed form. By the end of March, the student was able to independently write a poem and also use vocabulary words from science to write an informational paragraph.

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. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact

There is curricular coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness through rigorous tasks where all learners, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula reviewed demonstrated Common Core alignment and intentional integration of instructional shifts and math practices. For example, a grade 5 math unit focused on student's use of equivalent fractions as a strategy to add and subtract fractions. Instructional maps evidenced planned application of skills where students are required to use visual representations along with showing their mathematical thinking.
- Teachers use a Common Core, Danielson *Framework for Teaching*-aligned lesson plan template. A grade 5 math lesson plan documents higher-order thinking questions on Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* Level 3 and 4. A grade 8 English Language Arts class lesson plan demonstrates rigorous practices utilizing the accountable-talk method, requiring students to discuss the causes and consequences of the Great Migration, discussing its impact on history and comparing fiction and non-fiction accounts of the period in history.
- A grade 8 living environment lesson plan on DNA, reproduction, and biotechnology demonstrates instruction for all level learners including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The focus of the lesson was "How have designer babies impacted mankind? Should we have the ability to design our own offspring?" Students read an article entitled "*Designer Babies, The Truth behind Preimplantation.*" High performing students were required to provide detailed responses in responding to questions such as "Explain how evidence supports this idea? How does this part of the article support your idea?" Lower performing students including students with disabilities were assisted in putting their reactions into questions and were provided an opportunity to speak first before other students.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, that are aligned with the school’s curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers and students have actionable and meaningful feedback regarding student achievement. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students’ learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics are used by both teachers and students school-wide. Students use the school’s *Peer Edit Self Reflection Extended Response Checklist* to provide feedback to each other. This checklist includes columns for student self-assessment and peer assessment. Peers rate each other on a mastery scale from zero to four, provide an explanation of the grade noting what was done well and what needs improvement. In an English class, a student completed a checklist where the students self-critique was almost aligned with the peer rater who stated that the student added details to support his answer and wrote that his partner can improve his writing by using correct capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. In a math class, groups were required to assess their understanding of the material responding to the prompt “How does the math group’s thinking demonstrate efficiency and accuracy?” and “Based on the essential question, what can the next steps be for the group? Explain.”
- Based on a written assignment on the book *The Outsiders*, a student shared an essay rubric and teacher feedback that stated, “The written conclusion and introduction that support your essay is engaging and overall well written, when quoting a text, use page numbers.” The rubric also listed the standards that the essay addressed as well as documenting the understanding of the standards based on scores of mastery from zero to four.
- Teachers use a standards-based math rubric that measures performance on a scale from novice to apprentice in areas of problem solving, reasoning, communication, connections, and representation. A novice shows little or no engagement in the task and no attempt to build on mathematical representation. An apprentice shows evidence of drawing on prior knowledge and an attempt to build on mathematical representation.
- In all classrooms visited, teachers checked for understanding and asked higher-order thinking questions to gauge student comprehension and promote dialogue. For example, in a grade 5-math class, the teacher, noticing students having difficulty, walked among students asking clarifying questions such as “How did you convert between the different measures?” and “What needs to be done to complete this?”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness, partnering with parents to support students. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provides clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance/advisement supports.

Impact

Successful partnerships with families support student progress toward meeting set expectations. Students are well supported so that they are prepared for their next level of education and demonstrate ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has documented high expectations in the staff handbook that is distributed to all instructional staff members. The policies include elements required in lesson plans and a section on expectations for teachers which include taking notes on students during a lesson, using data in planning, and providing opportunities for students to show understanding. To ensure that expectations are being met, the principal monitors Google Drive where teachers are required to organize and document professional work. Additionally, expectations are reinforced with professional development sessions given by teachers and leadership that further illustrate mutual accountability. Teacher-led professional development occurs each cycle throughout the school year to support these initiatives.
- Students have a portfolio log that communicates instructional information, testing dates, and a section that asks parents to record what growth they have seen in their children and what areas of instruction they would like for teachers to focus on. An example of parent feedback included “His writing has improved but he still needs to continue to express himself both in content and in his writing.” Parents have stated that the logs are useful in keeping them informed about their children’s’ progress and of next steps that the student must accomplish to prepare for the next level. A monthly newsletter also goes out to parents informing parents of important dates.
- The guidance counselor meets with grade 8 students every two weeks to discuss high school preparation. Students have stated that these meetings provide clarity. Grade 8 students shared that that they know what high school they are going to and what they would like to study. Students stated that portfolio logs help prepare them for the next level. The guidance counselor shared 2014-15 School Quality Guide data metrics for former grade 8 students indicating that the school scored a value of 92.9% for “9th Grade Adjusted Credit Accumulation of Former 8th Graders” and a value of 99% for “Percent of 8th Graders Earning HS [High School] Credit.”