



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Renaissance School of the Arts

Middle School M377

**319 East 117 Street
Manhattan
NY 10035**

Principal: Brian Bradley

**Date of review: March 9, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Gary Knight**

The School Context

Renaissance School of the Arts is a middle school with 162 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 45% Black, 53% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 34% students with disabilities. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.3%.

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	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	Proficient
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	Celebration	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	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:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

As a result, the school's assessments and rubrics provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. The school tracks progress and adjusts instructional decisions so that all students demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has created an assessment cycle that includes the administering of the following tests: Common Core-aligned and internet-based R for English Language Arts and math baselines, Degrees of Reading Power, Achieve 3000 for reading Lexile levels, and Revolution K12 math software. The school also assesses with G.R.A.S.P. Tasks (Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Product), which are performance based, end-of-unit rubric-based culminating tasks.
- The school's analysis of the Rally data captures student performance on a quarterly basis across the grades and school wide. The school also tracks student outcomes across the grades for students with disabilities. For example, the Rally benchmarks show the greatest increase in student performance was in grade 8, with a 33.4% increase from September to March. Overall, the school's performance increased by 20.3. Students with disabilities showed an increase of 21.6% across the grades. Based on findings, teachers are providing more time during class to re-teach text analysis and engage in guided reading. Students' reading data was also used to determine student placement for the school's strategic reading period.
- Writing evaluations, essays, science lab reports, Common Core solutions to real-world math problems, and short responses are some of the rubrics used throughout the school. Feedback is provided to students mostly in the form of glows and grows. For example, a science lab report on lever design, a student received a 3.6 out of a possible score of 4. The following feedback was provided, "Great job using the R.I.C.E. (Restate problem, Infer thinking, Cite or Compute and Explain) method in your answers and using the background information to support your answers. Make sure to review your notes to help with formulating your hypothesis. The relationship between the variables and the predicted results has been stated, but logic is not accurate."
- Students shared that rubrics are used in every class. They were also able to articulate their next steps, based on feedback, in order to improve. For example, one student knew she needed to improve with the use of relevant evidence and making sure it relates to her claim. Feedback to students on a science performance tasks stated, "During your data analysis, refer back to your notes for appropriate background information." Feedback on writing assignments included, "Give more background information before the quote as well as an explanation afterward, and you mention literary devices, but did not give any examples of them, or any analysis of your quotes that are relevant."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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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. Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts, and teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula for all learners.

Impact

While all learners had opportunities to engage in appropriately challenging tasks, there were missed opportunities to apply higher order thinking to questions and to provide high quality extensions.

Supporting Evidence

- Lessons observed were aligned to the curricula and reflected the infusion of the instructional shifts. For example, during a grade 7 writing lesson, students were evaluating extended responses to questions to determine whether or not they demonstrated proper analysis of a text to support a valid inference. A social studies lesson had students engaged in developing an argument based on text evidence, and, in a math lesson, students were asked to analyze and solve pairs of simultaneous linear equations.
- Lessons were constructed with various ways of providing student access. Teaching strategies included the use of sentence frames, manipulatives, graphic organizers, homogeneous grouping based on latest assessment scores, and differentiated text based on students' ability. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were grouped based on writing response baseline data. As a result, different sets of reading passages were given to groups. In a social studies class, students were also grouped homogeneously and received a bubble map and a claims and evidence graphic organizer to help create an argument. Students were also provided the Restate, Infer, Cite, Explain (R.I.C.E.) method organizer to help with the development of their writing pieces. Students read about the culture and the values of ancient Athens and Sparta and developed arguments, with evidence captured on organizers, as to which of the two city-states was better. For example, one student responded that Sparta was better and referred to the text to support her claim that because of their well-trained army and the fact that they were inarguably the best warriors in all of Greece.
- Although lessons allowed for multiple entry points, there were moments observed where there were opportunities missed to further engage students and to push the level of rigor and critical thinking. In a science class on Newton's third law of motion, a teacher asked, how is velocity related to how high the ball bounced? The student's response was not very clear, nor was it expanded upon. Students were also struggling with grasping the full concept of the lesson due to their inability to recall the previously taught content on the three laws of motion. Instructional adjustments were not made; instead, a student was asked to re-write the three laws on the board for the class while the class continued through the activity. In addition, some classes provided high quality extensions and anchor activities to lessons; however, this was not evidenced in the vast majority. For example in one class, students were provided the chance to evaluate an additional extended response, whereas, in another, when a student was asked, "What do you do when you are done?" he replied, "Wait for everybody else to finish."

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills for all students across grades and subjects.

Impact

The school leaders' and staff's ability to ensure curricula alignment promotes college and career readiness and infuses rigor across the grades and subjects for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses the *Code X* curriculum for English Language Arts along with aspects of the Teachers' College writing program. Teacher-made curricula are created in other subjects with supplements such as eBooks, News ELA, Achieve 300, and Revolution K12 as additions to further enhance curricula. In an effort to build coherence, curriculum mapping is done as a school wide activity followed up with weekly lesson planning during structured grade and department team meetings.
- Curricular documents reviewed include Common Core Learning Standards, performance tasks, citywide expectations, and academic vocabulary and assessment tools. For example, a grade 6 science curriculum-planning map required students to ground reading, writing and discussion in evidence from text. A grade 7 ELA document expects students to cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as to draw inferences from the text.
- Curricula maps and a teacher-developed lesson plan template that are used school-wide, incorporate higher order thinking questions. Some of the questions on a social studies plan were, "What designs did Middle Eastern countries adopt from Asia?", "How can we render Iznik tiles using Chinese potters as inspiration?" and "How can we render an original Eye of Horus?" The review of grade 6 dance curriculum document showed that students were expected to respond to levels 3 and 4 Depth of Knowledge questions with such questions as, "How do we connect the basics of dance to create our end of rotation performance?", "How do we apply levels and time to our movements in space?" and "How do we compare and contrast cultural norms from an Arab audience to an American audience?" A grade 7 planning document has the following essential question, how do we gather and interpret evidence that Earth is continually changing?

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school leader consistently communicates high expectations to the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness and offer ongoing feedback to families.

Impact

The school leader provides training and has a system of accountability for those expectations. Families understand student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The faculty's core belief is that is their responsibility as educators to develop students to think critically with a focus on literacy and higher order questioning. As a result, the school leader reinforces expectations through various methods that include a staff handbook, professional development, targeted observation and feedback, and weekly principal's notes. For example, a review of a principal's note showed that teachers were reminded to review feedback and implement recommendations from observations. It also stated that the key elements that the principal will be looking for included, but were not limited to, student-to-student engagement and execution of strategies discussed at a previous meeting. In addition, it indicated an upcoming professional development session focused on questioning and enhancing student discussions.
- In addition to the administration conducting observations, there are systems of accountability in place through a team structure where teacher leaders further communicate expectations and staff work to ensure they meet expectations. The school also has in place a coaching visit form that captures what coaching support was provided to teachers to help them meet expectations. This form and its contents are shared with the principal.
- The school communicates with families through emails, phone calls, Renaissance School of the Arts Parent monthly newsletters, letters and school calendars, principal's meetings, Tuesday engagement time, and regularly scheduled Parent Teacher Association meetings. The school uses Skedula's Pupil Path on-line student information system to communicate with families regarding student performance. In addition, parent institutes are conducted to address with families key academic information and promotional policy. The school also conducts training that encourages families to be a part of the learning process. They are provided multiple sessions on test preparation strategies for English Language Arts and math. The families receive information specific to their children's grade level. Work packets are also sent home for parents to help their children to complete and submit. Students receive extra credit once these packets are handed in.

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 and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

The school's inquiry-based collaborations have strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers. Teacher teams' analysis of student work typically results in improved teacher practice toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- An ELA team that meets weekly was observed engaged in professional collaboration, using the atlas protocol to examine student work related to a Rally assessment, with a focus on analyzing evidence from text using the R.I.C.E. method. Student work reflected a general education student and a student with a disability. The analysis revealed that although both students used the R.I.C.E. method in writing, they were missing the analysis of text. As a result, the instructional decision was made that the teacher would need to revisit and re-teach how to analyze and not simply retell details. This would be done by providing students a level 1, 2, and 3 rubric for analysis, and have students evaluate and give reasons for their ratings. Students would then engage in scaffolded activities until they are analyzing larger amounts of text independently. A grade 8 Degrees of Reading analysis document highlights strengths, weaknesses, overall patterns, and strategies to implement across subjects for a group of students. One specific strategy that was applied across the classes was the use of double entry journals.
- The teacher team structure has made teachers more aware of skills to focus on and has allowed them to deliver instruction in a more effective way based on strategies generated from team meetings. A lesson in a grade 8 class visited, included, guided practice with specific focus questions, planned opportunities to stop and jot, homogeneous grouping, and leveled text and questions. These strategies were implemented as a result of the teacher recognizing that students struggled with synthesizing information and developing responses to include specific detail and explanation. An Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) science lesson, as a result of identifying that students were not completing extended response questions with sufficient relevant information, incorporated a review of a 4 point rubric. The teacher shared with class, a level 2 response and had the class add on what was missing. A completed response was then modeled by the teacher, followed by independent practice of going through and completing extended responses and evaluating the final product.
- Teachers acknowledged growth in the use of the R.I.C.E. method, which was evidenced in an ICT social studies class visit, has increased student performance in the number of correct responses. A grade 8 Rally assessment data showed up to 14 percent increase from November to February, in the percent of questions students got correct. Further review of evidence indicate student growth across the grades in ELA. For example, targeted student progress data analysis for grade 7 ELA, indicate approximately 7 percent increase from October to February.