



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Professional Performing Arts High School

Middle-High School M408

**328 West 48 Street
Manhattan
NY 10036**

Principal: Keith Ryan

**Date of review: April 20, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

Professional Performing Arts High School is a middle-high school with 547 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 5% Asian, 23% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 44% White students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners and 13% students with disabilities. Boys account for 26% of the students enrolled and girls account for 74%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.5%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Additional Findings	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	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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and include academic tasks that emphasize rigorous habits.

Impact

Purposeful curricula decisions build instructional coherence, promote college and career readiness, and consistently emphasize higher-order skills for diverse learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create Common Core-aligned curricula that emphasize reading, writing, research, and elements of performance. For example, in order to explore a historical figure who has fought for equality for groups of American citizens, students research a self-selected individual, present research findings to persuade their team of peers why the leader deserves a national monument, and, ultimately, the group comes to consensus on the best choice. In a semi-final competition, groups design monuments, calculate costs, and prepare a portfolio for the federal funding board. In the final competition judged by the school community, the group work is displayed and the presentation that reflects the most strategic thinking and planning earns the win. In a tenth grade humanities task, students analyze characters in Shakespeare's *Othello* in order to strengthen their performance. Questions such as "Why would Shakespeare make Othello epileptic?" and "Why doesn't Desdemona defend herself?" help students "find voices for the characters" they portray. Similarly, in a ninth grade task, students write two-character ghost scenes that expand upon but do not alter character motivation or the original plotline of the play, *Oedipus the King*.
- In addition to performance tasks, teachers create assignments that invite students to articulate their understanding visually, based on text evidence. In the study of symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*, students collaborated to create visual representations that connected the novel's featured symbols to the text excerpt that exemplified its significance. Two students pointed to their displayed work, and shared that the band-aids over the woman's ears represented the character's willfulness to "piece herself back together" despite society's isolation.
- The school-wide focus on literacy embodies tasks across grades and subjects. For example, a compare and contrast essay requires students to consider which civilization was more successful, Sparta or Athens. Students study the social, political, intellectual and/or economic successes or challenges of each, and engage in the writing process by preparing outlines, developing thesis statements, and employing the MEL-Con essay format. Science students explained a proof of the Pythagorean Theorem and its universe, and responded to prompts such as "Why do you think negative ions move through the salt bridge?" to help them to compose introductory paragraphs for lab reports.

Area of Focus

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

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that promote implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, and distributed leadership structures are in place to build teachers' leadership capacity.

Impact

School teams strengthen teachers' instructional capacity; however, student achievement for all learners is less consistent. While teacher leaders have a voice in key decisions regarding student learning, they are working toward playing an integral role in student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The Professional Development Team consists of five content area teachers who ensure that school teams align goals to the school's literacy focus. To this end, teachers present literacy practices during professional learning time with a focus on "What can we systematically do in every class to support reading?" as evidenced in the March agenda. Additionally, the team leaders meet their goal to build teacher's instructional capacity by helping teams to use protocols for looking at student work. The team leaders also partner with special educators to visit art teachers' classrooms and provide the teachers with feedback on differentiating instruction. Support is also provided to Integrated Co Teaching (ICT) pairs in grouping students based on data. This work is captured in team minutes and classroom visit feedback forms. Improved teacher practice and embedded literacy approaches were evident in classrooms visited, and teachers expressed the impact professional learning has had on their practice. However, there was less consistent documentation for how this improvement impacts student learning across the school.
- After school teams completed analysis of State assessments across content areas. The pattern that surfaced was students' difficulty responding to text-heavy questions. It was agreed, therefore, that teams would focus on reading comprehension and text synthesis across subjects. This compelled the humanities team to revisit their writing expectations for grades 6 through 12, and to create a map of essay benchmark skills, projects, texts, grammar elements, and literacy habits for each grade. This living document created a set of cohesive reading and writing approaches such as evidence and vocabulary logs, summaries of history timelines, and annotating texts. Additionally, the math team emphasizes key vocabulary such as quotient or factor on word walls and in lessons. However, the systems that teams use to track the impact of this initiative on increased student achievement for all learners were not consistent across teams.
- The school's focus on literacy is reflected in team meeting minutes and discussions. For example, the science team minutes indicated that the team incorporated literacy strategies into the Science Expo project design to include summarizing texts, research, draft writing, and the consistent use of vocabulary word walls as a resource for learners. The ICT humanities team looked at student writing and a set of potential graphic organizers as to serve as a uniform support for all learners. During the discussion, the team realized that deciding on one organizer for all learners would require more discussion of individual student need. They agreed to continue this discussion at the next team meeting.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
--------------------	--------------	---------	------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices align to the curricula and a set of beliefs about how students learn best, and engage students in higher order thinking in discussions.

Impact

Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and promote high levels of student participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that the culture of the school is “tied to Danielson’s domain three” and is reflected in the school’s “social contract” introduced and explored in the first months of the year and displayed across classrooms. The contract emphasizes high quality student-to-student discussion during which students balance empathy with peer-to-peer critique, and that this is how students learn best. For example, in an eleventh grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) humanities class students worked in groups to examine a set of documents connected to the Japanese Internment, such as a photograph, a poem, and the Executive Order 9066. The focus of their examination was to find evidence of bias and weigh the United States decision to intern Japanese American citizens. After each student read and annotated their document, they shared what they learned in groups and cited textual evidence to substantiate their understanding. For example, in two groups, students recognized that the photograph of a child eating a large plate of food was propaganda to mask the indignity of the camp experience. One student noted that in reviewing the documents, “We see America giving false information.”
- In preparation for an upcoming quiz, science students engaged with partners or triads in an online interactive visual of a voltaic cell to learn how the cell functions. They supported each other in responding to prompt questions as they viewed the video. Although many students worked independently in their groups, they also shared ideas with each other or responded to the teacher’s check-in questions. Ninth graders in an English class, rotated through self-selected essay writing stations targeted to areas for improvement such as introductions, conclusions, or evidence development, and one station offered students, who were ready to receive peer feedback on completed drafts, that option. This ensured that students assessed the area they needed to work on, and provided similar opportunities for advanced writers. One student stated, “This helped me to see that even though I had a lot of good evidence, it was vague.” She returned to her text. Another student was working on revising her draft for more sophisticated vocabulary.
- In an upper level English class, after students annotated a passage from *Northanger Abbey*, they engaged in lively small group discussions to determine how techniques such as satire, irony, or understatement, reflected social or political commentary. One student offered that although the character is described as “plain” she saw it as “ironic because it makes a boring character interesting.” Another student added that the author mocks her, but “it is a low key appraisal” and read the line from the passage where this was in evidence. Her groupmate stated that she had not noticed this yesterday. One expectation for the discussion was that each student speaks at least twice, allowing for every student in this class to be engaged in high levels of engagement and text-based discussions.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms teachers use or create assessments and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula to check for student understanding.

Impact

Teachers provide feedback to students and to each other regarding student progress and make adjustments to curricula and instruction to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers circulated during small group discussions to check for and push student thinking. For example, during a chemistry lesson, the teacher paused to get a sense of what students understood by instructing them to respond to several quick prompts independently. He then moved them back into their groups and checked for misconceptions. Similarly, in addition to circulating and asking probing questions to push student thinking in an ELA class, the teacher required students to record their discussions on their cell phones. A student shared that this allows the teacher to "listen to all of our group discussions later, and provide us with feedback" the next day.
- During a student performance in a drama class the teacher provided rubric-aligned feedback to students on their first scene rehearsal. The teacher's feedback focused on how the props contributed to performance. All students recorded notes based on subject, occasion, audience, purpose, and speaker (SOAPS), criteria to prepare for the ensuing feedback discussion during which students suggested more realistic use of language and stronger reactions to "create suspense."
- Teachers use information from formative assessments to adjust their instruction. For example, when a history teacher's students' misunderstood the text, the teacher added reading response choices such as visualizing, inferring, and determining importance, for their reading the next day. In a set of algebra lesson plans, the teacher recorded that students needed more time to review solutions to inequalities, and recorded the adjustment to pacing indicated in the next day's lesson plan.
- After analysis of several post lesson quizzes, two sixth grade math ICT teachers divided their class into two groups based on low-, mid- or high- performance, and taught the same lesson, but adjusted the pacing to meet the needs of their learners. This resulted in an increase in quiz grades, more student participation, and fewer exam retakes. Similarly, when an eighth grade teacher examined her students' in-class writing and noted a trend regarding organization, she adjusted her lesson so that students could discuss their writing processes, and justify a grade for sample body paragraphs. Rather than continue with the World War I content, the teacher focused on strengthening student writing.
- All students receive actionable feedback on work products such as "connect this idea to political systems effect on history" or "refer to examples," and students understand that rubrics help them to improve their work. One student shared, "In my essay on the Declaration of Independence, there was one area on the rubric where I didn't meet high standards, using my voice. My teacher's feedback helped me do a lot better on my next draft." Another student said that the feedback that helped him the most was to write to his audience, and attributed his "7 out of 9" grade to this feedback.

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

Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations connected to a path to college and career to all students and their families.

Impact

Families are aware of their student’s progress toward the school’s high expectations and students receive support and feedback to prepare them for their next academic level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents spoke to the level of communication they receive from all of their students’ teachers. One parent attributed her daughter’s early graduation to “being able to communicate directly with teachers.” She received daily emails and was very impressed. Another parent noted that the school’s online grading platform sends emails to all parents to alert them of missed assignments, and due dates, “It’s a nice tool to keep us aware.” Additionally, “there is ongoing student-teacher interaction so that students regularly receive feedback when they need it.”
- Students are prepared for higher levels of education starting in their freshman year when they take a Freshman Forum class that prepares them for the transition to high school and to the school’s expectations regarding college and career readiness. In this forum, students are introduced to the organizational and study skills necessary for academic success, learn about the research process, the school’s grading policy, and the use of Edline to monitor and own their progress. Additionally, the school’s social contract communicates academic and social expectations to all students and their families, and is an integral part of the school’s instruction and curricula. It emphasizes the core values of the school, engagement, and empathy, and focuses on behaviors that promote academic success such as managing time and engaging respectfully with others.
- The college office offers all students and their families opportunities to visit colleges, review transcripts, and select college preparatory courses such as Calculus, Advanced Placement classes in United States History, Biology, and literature, and ongoing information regarding the college process. The College Office calendar apprises students and families of relevant monthly events such as presentations of college lessons or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, and support with college essay writing. Additionally, at the close of their senior year all students produce a public policy exit project that engages them in college-level research. In sum, this targeted work resulted in 80% of students being accepted into four year colleges.