



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

**Preparatory Academy for Writers:
A College Board School**

Secondary School Q283

**143-10 Springfield Boulevard
Queens
NY 11413**

Principal: Charles Anderson

**Date of review: February 26, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Deborah Burnett-Worthy**

The School Context

Preparatory Academy for Writers: A College Board School is a middle-high school with 584 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 85% Black, 6% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 1% English Language Learners and 16% students with disabilities. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 97.0%.

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	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	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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	---	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Scheduled professional collaborations allow teams of teachers to share content knowledge and instructional strategies for improving teaching and learning across the school. Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work and student work.

Impact

The inclusion of all staff in a multitude of teams has strengthened instructional capacity, promoted the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and resulted in increased student achievement and schoolwide instructional coherence for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Each of the three main inquiry teams design, implement, and continuously review and revise their action plans based on discoveries their inquiry work reveals about the achievement of all learners. The middle school inquiry team, grades 6-8, used the Mastery Connect tracking program to document item skills analysis for all students and provide remediation and individualized lessons based on students' needs. The inquiry team for grade 9 and 10, used data from Jupiter Ed, an online grading and communication program, and identified areas of concern and created next steps for students. The grade 11 and 12 inquiry team combined a graduation tracker and student transcripts to focus on students who were off track in their completion of credits and Regents exams. This focus resulted in an improvement in the number of students on track for graduation. Data revealed over two dozen students moving from off track in September to on track for graduation by February, the start of the second term.
- Professional collaborations strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers as documented by the progression of the middle school, and both high school inquiry teams towards the achievement of goals they set as a result of their partnerships. All three inquiry teams set goals to increase their average evaluation scores on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* component that focuses on using questioning and discussion techniques. The middle school team set a goal of improving from 2.9 to 3.5. The grade 9 and 10 team set a goal of 3.1 from 2.6 and the grade 11 and 12 team set a goal of 3.5 from 3.0. A midyear check revealed a current average score of 3.4 school-wide, which exceeds the goals of one team and is approaching the goal of the other two.
- Agenda's, attendance sheets and logs revealed that inquiry teams regularly review English Language Arts (ELA) assessment data and accompanying student work. The team uncovered strengths in reading and comprehending literature, stories and poems and struggles in reading and comprehending literary nonfiction and informational text. Curricula and lesson plans were adjusted to include more exposure to and skill building around the comprehension and analysis of nonfiction. Inter-visitations were conducted to strengthen teacher practice in supporting students with these skills. The result was improved teacher practice as substantiated by an increase of instructional core observation scores for teachers and groups of students meeting mastery goals in their demonstration of comprehension of literary nonfiction and instructional text.

Area of Focus

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

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies and academic tasks are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. However, instructional strategies do not always illustrate optimal use of extensions that enrich discussions and evoke student ownership of learning.

Impact

While cognitively demanding tasks promote rapid student progress towards being college and career ready, there are missed opportunities to further push student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices at this school require three learning stations in every lesson, across grade and content areas: one dedicated to reading, one dedicated to writing and one dedicated to discussion. In a Living Environment class, students were grouped at a writing station where they were tasked with choosing a trimester of pregnancy and creating a cartoon or story around that stage of development. A reading center with three different leveled articles that students had to choose from to write a journal entry using a three-part journal prompt; a discussion group where students discussed factors of a healthy or not healthy lifestyle for a pregnant woman. The discussion was led by students and guided by charts and diagrams. Similar stations were also observed in math, English, and social studies classes across grades.
- The teaching practice of providing a rubric and actionable feedback is a school-wide policy that aligns with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. This practice also requires students to peer- and self-assess their work products as demonstrated by the questions that students are required to answer at the end of a rubric assessing a social studies midterm project. They include, "Why do you feel you deserve the grade you gave yourself?" One student's response read, "I met the highest standard on the rubric in all categories." Another question asked, "What would you do differently with this assignment were you to get another one like it?" A student replied, "I would probably do deeper research for information." Finally, the rubric questions also included, "What advice do you have for me about this assignment in the future?" One student answered, "I would ask for a good example of finished product."
- Across classrooms, discussions reflected high levels of student thinking. In an English class a student posed with the question "Why is the forest the appropriate setting for the secret meeting of the characters?" responded, "This setting is appropriate because the forest symbolizes sin and savagery... the perfect setting away from extreme judgment of the puritan society." In a student-led discussion in a social studies class, the student leader posed the questions, "What is a community's responsibility to the individual?" and "What is the individual's responsibility to the community?" Classmates responded, "Respectful laws to protect its citizens." "Fairness. If there was no fairness then it would start a whole chain of problems, like in the real world."
- Not every opportunity to push students' critical thinking skills was exercised. On more than one occasion, only two or three minutes were dedicated to student discussion time. This lack of proper pacing limited the opportunity for the meaningful exploration and ownership of the rigorous subject matter.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Across subject areas and grades, rich curricula offer all students very rigorous learning experiences that require them to demonstrate high levels of critical thinking. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

All students demonstrate their thinking through accessible and rigorous tasks that cognitively engage them.

Supporting Evidence

- Rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills are emphasized in the grade 7 ELA curriculum unit focusing on critical theories and social justice. All students were required to write a reaction paper examining a critical theory and lens issue. Students then had to explore how the particular lens issue is applicable to the world as evident in literature.
- Rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills are emphasized in the grade 9 Living Environment curriculum unit on cells and enzymes. All students were required to create an analogy of the cell and its organelles to a nonliving unit. Additionally, all students had to pick a system unit of their choice such as a house, government, mall or school and compare to an animal or plant cell. All learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, had to demonstrate their thinking.
- In the grade 10 Common Core Algebra curriculum unit on polynomials and solving linear equations and inequalities, all students were required to create two word problems of their choice that could be modeled by a linear inequality and equations in one variable. They had to explain how they used knowledge of operations with polynomials to obtain their answer. Students also answered analysis questions to interpret their answers. Reviewing student work and data revealed that although three Integrated Co-Teaching students scored 87% or higher, most students with disabilities struggled with the assignment as it was. The curriculum and task was refined so that ELLs and students with disabilities are now experiencing cognitive engagement.
- A grade 8 United States history lesson plan on the industrialization and urbanization of the Progressive Era required students to perform several rigorous tasks. Students had to exercise their critical thinking skills to conduct a close read of informational text, cite evidence to support claims or conclusions, speak, listen and present in collaboration with classmates and begin preparations for the research and writing of a thematic essay.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Assessment practices aligned to the curricula across all grades and content areas incorporate extensive use of ongoing real time assessments including rubrics and varied checks for understanding. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Impact

Teachers and students are provided with actionable and meaningful feedback regarding student achievement. Students' learning needs are met and they are made aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers create and use rubrics that align with the school's curricula and offer actionable and meaningful feedback to students. For example, to receive a level four on the readers' notebook entry rubric in the depth of thinking category, a student is required to use a variety of analytical skills making varied connections and drawing conclusions about the author's purpose. To receive a level four on the journal writing rubric in the development category, a student must use specific and relevant examples to support ideas and make insightful connections between content and life. The teachers' bulletin board rubric for displaying assessed student work requires the teacher's feedback be closely connected to specific examples in the student work and include detailed realistic next steps in order to get a level four. For example, one teacher gave this feedback to a student, "I don't think you understood the question. What they mean by 'appearances' is how the character is being 'viewed', not just physically but figuratively. Please explain how Hester was figuratively viewed by the community." Grade 8 math students working in groups were given a rubric and tasked with determining the grades of their classmates (level zero, one, two, or three) for short answer responses.
- Lesson plans and classroom visits showed that ongoing assessment practices are strategically embedded in daily lesson plans and include questioning, peer sharing in student discussions, groups and partner work and immediate feedback from teacher conferences check-ins. These embedded practices are in addition to the formative and summative assessments listed in the lesson plans across grades and content areas.
- The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress by tracking school goals for all learners. Benchmark assessments in math, science, literacy and social studies from grade 6 through the grade 12 were given to all students in August and September. It is documented that no students in grades 6, 8,9,11 and 12 had achieved mastery in any of the Common Core Learning Standards tested. Three percent of grade 10 students demonstrated mastery in one math standard and six percent demonstrated mastery in another. Benchmark assessments given in January and February revealed that 57% of grade 6 students, 61% of grade 8 students and 68% of grade 10 students demonstrated mastery in the same assessed standards, showing clear progress towards achieving school goals. This demonstration was reflected across grade and content areas. Grade 9 students increased from 0% to 20% demonstrating mastery in Global History and Geography. The grade 11 students showed progress from 0% to 19% demonstrating mastery in United States History and Government. All grades exhibited an increased demonstration of mastery from 8% to 43% on assessed literacy-based Common Core Learning Standards.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff members that are aligned with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. School leaders and staff members effectively communicate a path to college and career readiness to families.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability among staff members and successful partnerships with families both result in student progress toward college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Communication tools such as the staff handbook, Jupiter Ed, an online grading and communication system, staff meetings, memos, feedback on formal observations, and professional development workshops all serve as vehicles for school leaders to consistently deliver clear messages of high expectations to all staff members. One memo from school leaders included the announcement that “the lead teacher is in the best position to collect anecdotal data and identify the trends that are affecting the students in each grade level who are struggling. Therefore, as the school year progresses, lead teachers will work with school administrators to create inquiry questions that will create discussions, focus on data analysis, and drive instructional change strategies.”
- During faculty meetings and professional development workshops, school leaders conduct reviews of professionalism and instructional expectations that align with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Staff members were reminded of the school-wide expectation that within the first week of a new unit of study, teachers are required to submit a copy of the unit overview, a copy of the summative assessment, a copy of the traditional assessment and a copy of the rubric to administration, students and parents. School leaders explained that this is necessary in order to ensure that teachers’ units and lessons are well planned, providing students with clear expectations and are presenting students with rigorous tasks that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.
- Students are given multiple opportunities to take rigorous coursework that will ensure college and career readiness. Middle school students have the ability to take up to three high school level classes, Earth Science, U.S. History, and Algebra each culminating in a Regents exam at the end of grade 8. Similarly, advanced placement courses are offered to high school students in all content areas. High school students who score above a 75 on any science Regents or English Regents exam can see their guidance counselor for information on registering for the *College Now* program through a partnership with York College. Through this, students can earn college credits while still in high school.
- Along with the unit plan, summative assessment and rubric that parents receive at the beginning of each academic unit, families are also invited to scholarship conferences at which students describe their academic journey and an action plan to meet their set goals. Families are offered insight into the expectations student have to meet to achieve success with the Common Core Learning Standards. This insight, in addition to the skills gained at the math and literacy parent workshops, has empowered parents to be a supportive contributing partner in their child’s academic journey.