



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

The Academy for Excellence through the Arts

Early Childhood Q303

**108-55 69 Avenue
Queens
NY 11375**

Principal: Barbara Leto

**Date of review: May 19, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier**

The School Context

The Academy for Excellence through the Arts is an early childhood school with 195 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 2. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 37% Asian, 3% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 38% White students. The student body includes 1% English Language Learners and 8% students with disabilities. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 96.9%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

3.4 High Expectations

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations to families connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

Communication and professional development around high expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability. Partnerships with families support students in their progress toward college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Frequent classroom observations and feedback from administrators based on Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* contain specific language from the rubric, evidence from the classroom observation that supports the rating, and actionable next steps. These are then addressed in subsequent classroom observations. For instance, one teacher's ratings increased in the areas of the design and delivery of high-level questions as well as fostering student engagement from a classroom observation of October 27, 2015 to the follow-up observation on December 3, 2015. In the interim between these two, the principal conducted an informal "Pop-In" observation that resulted in non-evaluative, actionable feedback.
- In the course of professional development in preparing for this school year, in June 2015 a parent provided professional development to teachers. This parent is a professor of mathematics education at Brooklyn College. Also noted are 8 additional parents participating at the school in preparing students for college and career readiness through presentations on their professional experiences. Professions presented by parents have included a New York City (NYC) Police Department detective, doctor, nurse, information technology specialist, architect, and attorney.
- High expectations for all students are shared through workshops that enable parents to serve as supports for their children toward meeting those expectations as well as. Parents praised the workshops held at the school that enable them to assess their children's reading level, effectively engage them in conversation about the day at school as well as engage their children in activities to sharpen their thinking skills. The same math education professor who facilitated a professional development for teachers ran a workshop in October for parents on understanding the instructional shifts that have arisen from the Common Core Learning Standards. One parent reported, "That workshop helped me a lot. It helped me help my child a lot!"
- Teachers use the Remind.com and Shutterfly.com online platforms to empower parents to serve as active academic supports for their children. One parent said, "I get photos of classwork and reminders about what the kids are doing through Remind.com. I can also look at the themes and essential questions for each unit on Shutterfly." Another parent then said "I knew when they studied the life cycle of the butterfly, so I was prepared when my child got home. We talked about it and that helped her."

Area of Focus

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Across the school, grade teams meet on a consistent basis to analyze assessment data, student work products, and to share teaching strategies.

Impact

Teacher engagement in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations has strengthened their instructional capacity and promoted implementation of the instructional shifts. While systematic analysis of student data and work products has resulted in mastery of goals for groups of students, teacher teams are well positioned to increase their work's impact.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and subjects, progress monitoring data reveals increased achievement for all students. For example, reading levels for students at all levels have increased as per assessments delivered in November 2015 and subsequently at February 2016. Whereas no grade 3 students were reading on the Q level in November 2015, 9 students were at that level the following February. Similarly, while eleven students were distributed between levels L, M, and N in November 2015, only one of those eleven remained on level M, while all others progressed to levels O and P the following February. Math proficiency data shows similar evidence in increased student achievement.
- Coherence around differentiation and the planning and delivery of station-based instruction have resulted from the work teachers are doing within teams. One teacher reported, "We have some master teachers here when it comes to station learning. I went to their classrooms and observed. We then spoke and planned together. They put all their knowledge of it into me. And others." This practice was observed in a majority of classrooms. Another teacher reported that her teacher team colleagues taught her how to scaffold, use graphic organizer and organize assignments into chunks.
- The combined grades 2 and 3 teacher team analyzed students' informational writing. Analysis revealed that students were deficient in using details from the text and in the use of science vocabulary. The team focused interventions on the implementation of graphic organizers, in-class charts to support the development of science vocabulary and the use of sentence starters. Data from students' grades on the final, published piece reveal that all students' grades increased leaving no students earning below a 3. The combined grades kindergarten and 1 teacher team analyzed students' opinion writing. Analysis revealed that students were deficient in using details from the text to defend their opinions. After implementing instruction targeted to developing this skill, students' grades on the final, published piece revealed that all students' grades increased leaving only 1 student at the beginner level while the remaining seven members of the target group earned a grade of "secure." While mastery of goals for targeted student groups results from teacher team work, students will have a greater opportunity to master goals when the school expands the scope of its practice of analyzing common assessments in the identification of student groups that are connected via content as well as the current focus on grade level student groups.

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 the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

Common Core alignment and integration of instructional shifts in curricula and academic tasks has resulted in coherence of and promotion of college and career readiness for all students. Emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills require that all students demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula calendars are constructed using the Teachers College *Reading and Writing* and *GO Math!* programs as well as *Singapore Math*. The school also ensures curricula coherence with the NYC Social Studies Scope and Sequence and the science New York State (NYS) Standards. Teachers meet in grade level teams to plan common units that integrate instructional shifts. One example of the inclusion of the mathematics instructional shift to increase rigor is a unit for grade 1 that requires students to apply learned knowledge of coinage to the purchasing of a variety of products. An example of the inclusion of the English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shift to grounding reading and writing in textual evidence is an activity in which students are to form an opinion as to which of two stories is better and to support their arguments with evidence from the two stories.
- Student to student discussions are coherently planned for across curricular documents. In a grade 3 writing workshop lesson plan, students are to listen to a story read-aloud and then talk with a partner about the areas in the story that would benefit from added dialogue, along with how the story would be made better by that dialogue. In a grade 3 writing workshop, after listening to a read-aloud students are to turn and talk with a partner about what the story teaches about the Iroquois perspective on nature. Additionally, analysis of curricular documents show that pre-kindergarten students are counting objects beyond the number 5 and consistently observing how and identifying which groups are larger, grade 3 students are taking notes during read alouds, as well as writing critiques of government systems using textual evidence.
- Activities requiring higher-order thinking are evident in lesson plans, across grades and subjects, requiring that all learners, including special education students, demonstrate their thinking. For example, in grade 3 reading workshop, students are to analyze legends of the Iroquois and infer what they teach children about nature. Students are then to connect their inferences from this activity with inferences from prior readings. These student findings are to be expressed in paragraph form. In a grade 2 reading workshop lesson plan, students are to collectively brainstorm what they already know about the attributes of a story's setting and the effect that setting has on a reader's understanding of that story. Subsequently, students will engage in an accountable talk protocol requiring that they lead a discussion as to how the setting of the class text poses complications for the story's characters.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula, reflecting a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across these same classrooms, teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports.

Impact

Teaching practices across the vast majority of classes reflect school beliefs that students learn best through differentiated instruction. Strategies additionally ensure that all learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade 3 reading workshop, students were divided into differentiated groups and assigned to analyze an Iroquois tale and the implications the tale had on developing children’s understanding of nature. While each group was tasked with the same goal, their group assignments were differentiated allowing for all learners to be engaged. The general education teacher circulated amongst all groups checking in and offering assistance while the integrated co-teacher assisted the student group that included students with disabilities as well as the general education group that required the greatest amount of assistance.
- In a grade 2 reading workshop, students were engaged in active discussion around the elements of characterization followed by specific discussion of the characters of a text that each group member read in class. The group identified as struggling had the added support of a graphic organizer guiding them through the process of characterization along with the finding of evidence from the text to support those determinations. The on-track groups worked without this graphic organizer. All groups had the option to extend their learning passed the learning objective through an extension activity in which students were to connect the characters and problems in the story, determining how their character traits affected the way they addressed those problems.
- In a grade 1 reading workshop, students were divided into differentiated groups based on reading levels. One group was designated as exceeding, 2 were proficient and 1 approaching. During this lesson, student groups moved along 4 different stations. Those stations included one where the teacher was located to work with students on a guided group reading activity. Another station involved students using iPads to read leveled realistic fiction. A third station involved students using a graphic organizer guiding them through responding to a story. Finally, a fourth station involved students working cooperatively to play the Homophone Grab game in review of the previous week’s work on homophones. In addition to there being four stations, the work that each student group completed at each station was differentiated for their respective group’s ability level.
- In a pre-kindergarten class, students were divided into groups based on progress from the beginning of the current unit on counting. One group worked with the teacher as added support. Students used manipulatives to count sets of objects while talking with partners about their progress using the words “more” and “altogether.” As an extension activity, students could choose to increase the number of items they were adding to extend beyond the number 10.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. In addition, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

High quality assessment practices provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers' assessment practices result in effective instructional adjustments to meet all students' needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Students came to a quick consensus when reporting on the use of assessments and rubrics for written assignments and clarity around their attainment of mastery. After receiving rubrics with comments, that include written feedback with next steps from teachers, students then conference with teachers on the feedback and how it can impact their writing. Students then improve upon their writing by implementing the next steps detailed in the feedback and again turn in their assignments to their teachers. One example of feedback reads, "Explain and add more information about this," "Be specific. Name the crops," and "Try adding what a person who disagrees with you might say." Additionally, a grade 1 student reported that teachers gave "feedback about dialogue and description and using more interesting and challenging words, like delicious and fabulous and extraordinary."
- Across the school, students use checklists and rubrics as tools of self-assessment during the writing process. The grade 1 writing process rubric included high level statements such as "All of the information about my topic is correct," and "I noticed and fixed most of my writing and it looks fantastic." The "My Opinion Checklist" included declarative statements to which students check either (1) Yes, (2) Starting to, or (3) Not yet. Some examples of statements on this checklist are "I wrote my opinion and said why," and "I wrote at least 1 reason." In addition to using teacher designed rubrics and checklists, students are also using the rubrics that accompany the Teachers College Readers and Writers Workshop curricula.
- Across all classes, students were grouped based on assessment data. In addition to that, 4 classes contained groups that were based on assessment data from as recent as 1 day prior to the lesson. As students entered a grade 2 class the teacher indicated which students should sit with her for the next lesson. In a grade 1 class, students were regrouped for an exercise on the use of quotation marks. Students also make evidence their next steps by sharing via bulletin boards. In a grade 1 class, students indicate how they are doing today by the use of green, yellow or red cards. In a grade 2 class, students use a flip book that includes statements such as "I need help," "I can do this by myself," and "I can help someone else" as a method of sharing awareness of next learning steps and making themselves available to peers for helping them with their next learning steps. Additionally, across grades, students posted reading and writing goals.