



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

VOYAGES Preparatory

High School Q744

**45-10 94th Street
Queens
NY 11373**

Principal: Nicholas Bleiberg

**Date of review: December 10, 2015
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

The School Context

VOYAGES Preparatory is a high school with 232 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 9% Asian, 19% Black, 66% Hispanic, and 6% White students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners and 6% students with disabilities. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 64.1%.

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	Developing
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	Celebration	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	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness while establishing a culture for learning and high expectations for all students.

Impact

Ongoing detailed feedback, guidance and advisement help families understand their child's progress towards college and career readiness and also helps prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has established a committee to expose students and families to post-secondary options including college, trade, military and employment opportunities. The committee is composed of various staff members who use data to track attendance, student interests, and foster a culture of college and career readiness. One goal of the committee is to ensure students have opportunities to visit colleges. A majority of the students report having gone on a college trip including an overnight visit. One senior shared how "incredibly excited" he was that he was not only going to college, but he would be attending a school that is upstate and he had previously been out of the city very few times in his life.
- Mastery grading is used as the measure of success for students in the school. This assessment system was established as a result of conversations from prior years where staff felt students were not as college and career ready as they needed to be. Staff felt by moving grading towards mastery, students would not just be able "to complete work to pass." Instead, they would be measured by what they understand and the skills they have in the subject area. As such, regular formative assessments are used to give students a clear picture of how they are doing in class and progress reports are provided bi-weekly during an advisory period where students and staff discuss how they can improve or maintain their grades.
- Students have the opportunity to participate in a paid internship through the school Senior Activities Internship Program. This program offers students an opportunity to obtain meaningful real world experience after school or on weekends. A majority of students report they participate up to fifteen hours per week in the program and appreciate the opportunity. Students noted the program also helps them develop their resume and obtain valuable references, even when a student may need multiple placements before having success. A supervisor serves as a workplace mentor to help students further develop the skills necessary to graduate high school. All students agreed the school "pushes you and tells you it is about the end...they give you hope."
- Parents agreed the school phone calls, texts, and meetings effectively "give me all the information and let us know we are always welcome." Additionally, prior to their child attending this school, parents felt drugs and pregnancy were scary realities in their child's life; however, now they feel assured the school is "taking care of them" and developing goals for them to be successful in careers such as nursing.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned with beliefs about how students learn best through work products and class discussions.

Impact

The level of student participation and thinking is uneven across classes.

Supporting Evidence

- Students keep their binders in class and collect the documents they need when they arrive to class. Several students had some of their notes arranged in chronological order with an aim or essential question written out in their notebooks, while other students were observed not using their notebooks during instruction, even as teachers pointed out important details. As such, in many of the classes, student binders were empty or contained very few documents supporting their learning, even as students began the second trimester. Additionally, several students reported they do not know where their previous trimester binder notes were located.
- Instruction was mostly delivered to the whole group with common documents provided to all students. In a geometry class, students were given a note-taking sheet labeled “pre-assessment” on which they worked collectively to understand proper geometric notation and terminology. A majority of the students appeared disenfranchised from the lesson; some were reading directly from the board and were not on task when called on and had to clarify from where they were supposed to read. The teacher would often guide the students through the assigned task or reading to develop the answer when necessary. One student in the math class acknowledged he was “just guessing” because he didn’t read the information provided.
- In one literature class on fairy tales, students were assigned different pictures in small groups to interpret artwork and determine common themes of fairy tales and how fairy tales reflect cultural views. The teacher modeled the expectation with a class demonstration first, and then asked the students to answer how they would characterize the mood in the picture. One group of students characterized the mood in their picture as depressing, sad, and tragic. The student who said the picture appeared tragic was not satisfied with her word and asked her group for a better word. Her partner suggested melancholy, and they discussed it further and accepted it as a good suggestion although not all group members understood the meaning of the word. In an English class focused on investigating the burden of proof in courts through literature, students were introduced to a new four-question discussion strategy. Following a reading and annotation of a Time magazine article, “The Casey Anthony Verdict,” students in small groups discussed their interpretation of the author’s thoughts and tried to persuade or dissuade their partners through citing evidence while answering four questions. Dialogue amongst the group reflected an understanding of the task and high levels of student thinking and participation by most. However, small group work and high levels of thinking and participation were not observed in most other classes where teachers primarily lectured students who passively recorded information.

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 across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Curricula are designed to make purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of lesson plan documents shows identification of objectives for what the student will be able to do during instruction. Objectives were connected to the specific course of study. For example, in a New York City history class, two objectives of the learning task were stated as: "Identify reasons why present day New York City is an ideal location for a city and identify key evidence to support an answer." The lesson launch asks students to first discuss "Why do people come to New York City today?" Including writing and personal narrative in each lesson plan is essential to the school providing opportunities for students to develop their college and career readiness. Administration shared that instruction should plan to "be a window and mirror, so we want them to be exposed, grapple with themselves and bounce off each other and then have them be instructed and create products of what they know," independent of their ability to "read or calculate."
- A review of several unit and lesson plan documents across grades and content areas revealed essential questions, warm-up activities, classwork, and closing activities as integral components of each lesson plan. Class activities identified in a geometry unit plan include opportunities for students to share-out or have a discussion in every lesson. Several lesson plans ask for students to explain their calculations on the board and one has them correct any misconceptions shared during discussions of how a ruler can be used to effectively measure a line segment. In a forensics pathology lesson plan, students are expected to work in groups and identify the cause and manner in multiple descriptions of unusual deaths through the analysis and interpretation of evidence using scientific reasoning.
- An age of industrialization global studies lesson plan includes what students will be able to specifically accomplish from the intended lesson in preparation for college readiness through the use of 21st century skills. The document states students will be able to recall critical industrial revolutionary technology, analyze modern technology text, discuss ideas with classmates, respond in written blog form to prompts, and evaluate and consider partners' blogging ideas with responses.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers and students receive actionable feedback regarding student achievement so that they can make effective adjustments to meet the learning needs of all their learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Exit slips are an integral part of instructional formative assessment used by most teachers. For example, students learning about Apple and the impact Steve Jobs had were presented with an exit ticket and had to answer two questions with a brief explanation of minimally three-to-five sentences. Additionally, students were given an opportunity to question or comment on the lesson, including their classmates' responses. One student noted how the lesson helped them learn about Apple and Steve Jobs and how the company was very successful.
- Every two weeks students receive reports with feedback regarding their progress. These progress reports inform them about how they are performing on a sliding mastery scale. The school uses a mastery scale following a consensus opinion that traditional numerical grades are not beneficial for their student population because one poor value can turn a student off from future learning. They believe an aspiration of earning an "expert" rating on a sliding scale is more oriented toward giving students actionable feedback. The scale includes success with identifying key evidence, analyzing and interpreting evidence, and making connections between essential questions, enduring understandings and text in all content areas. The mastery scale is broken into five levels: zero, novice, apprentice, practitioner and expert. Students also receive anecdotal information on their report, such as "Fine work here. Your writing, in particular, is persuasive and well worded. The strongest element is the balance you maintain between differing opinions, despite the fact that you have an opinion of your own. One element to work on in this kind of writing: you must cite your evidence; this is how you back up your words."
- Rubrics are used to provide feedback to students during assignments and assessments on a sliding scale of mastery. Students shared during a conversation, "rubrics are used for everything so you can't say I didn't know what to do." Additionally, several assignments attached to the student work and graded rubric show feedback on the assignment with underlining key concepts and comments in the margins, although the feedback was not always actionable, with comments such as "nice" and "good."
- On a science assessment of microscopy and scientific methodology, students received checks and x's for their multiple choice responses. In one section students had to write a response on their understanding of the design of an experiment. An overall grade was not given for the student on the front page of the assessment. Instead, students were told to reference the attached rubric on the back for their level of understanding. Two rubrics for both microscopy and scientific methodology were provided with levels of achievement according to the mastery scale with an understanding of next steps.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on teams that may be loosely connected to school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

The use of an inquiry approach is developing across the teams, as evidence of the work does not necessarily result in improved teacher practice or progress towards goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Administration shared that teacher team meetings typically look at student assessments and work products. At an observation of a math department inquiry team, a shared agenda listed: review of student work and group according to justification attempts, consider write-up anticipated responses for different student groups, generate ideas to support different student groups, possibly revise and add questions to the write-up, and “name” the check for understanding. Several of the teachers appeared confused during the reviewing of documents as they asked the facilitator “where are we putting notes” and several members did not have a writing device for recording notes.
- Discussion during the inquiry team did not primarily focus on analyzing student work to promote progress towards strengthening instructional capacity or progress for groups of students. One teacher commented on how students will be able to answer the task meaningfully while another said “if the directions said to reread and justify your answer it would be better, so maybe we need to have directions say reread... but we know they don’t read directions...so it will put in their mind that they have to go back and then answer that.” A third teacher commented “so this may not be a good place for this?” At the conclusion of the meeting, the facilitator stated, “so students will complete this task and we will see how they respond to it.”
- Staff stated they aim to share out with their colleagues and improve their teacher practice by “looking deeply and discussing students’ work to improve our practice and the way we build our curriculum because the students come from all over the place and our algebra class isn’t just algebra.” The conversations often were not consistent in the manner that they addressed student misconceptions, student achievement or structures to improve pedagogy. Although teachers did acknowledge they are constantly giving quick checks following “every tiny concept and if they do poorly, we re-teach them in a new way...such as in class, we sit with groups and give them different examples.” Another teacher suggested having students who did not know the material sit with another student who knew it better.