



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

DreamYard Preparatory School

High School X329

**240 East 172 Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Alicia Wargo

**Date of review: April 7, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

The School Context

DreamYard Preparatory School is a high school with 296 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 38% Black, 59% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 21% 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 79.2%.

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	Developing
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	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in organized inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards resulting in strengthened instructional capacity of the teachers who have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are engaged in grade and department teams, as well as different committees, providing them opportunities to have voice in their school community. Each team has its own focus. For example, the English Language Arts (ELA) tenth grade focus is to increase the use of Writing as Thinking through Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) strategies. Teachers employ sentence frames to improve argumentative writing skills. The team leader for the math department stated that their focus is to use good questioning to guide student-to-student interactions to increase student voice. The visual art department's focus is to develop student voice through the use of a new Common Core Learning Standards-aligned rubric for presentations. Teachers shared that WITsi has given them concrete practices to help break down content to support student learning. They added that now they can address students' needs and not sacrifice content.
- Additionally, each department developed its own goal. The ELA department's goal for this school year is to have 76% of all students achieve a level 4 or higher on the Measure of Student Learning (MOSL) assessment for argumentative writing or in command of evidence on both Common Core ELA Regents assessments. To this end, teachers have conducted three rounds of inquiry to meet these goals. Teachers collect and present the evidence to the school community. Recent data reveal that 83% of the focus students achieved an increase of 41% growth in the focus standard. Teachers attribute this growth to the use of WITsi strategies, sentence frame scaffolding, and requiring a mandatory revision of the work product if the student scored 3 or below on the rubric.
- Distributed leadership is evident in that each teacher team has a teacher serving as the leader who has participated in related professional development. Teachers are empowered to revise and develop curricula to meet their students' needs. Teachers use a protocol for looking at student work and conducting inter-visitations, and they use the information they gather to determine next steps in their teaching.
- In a team meeting, teachers discussed the team visit to a colleague's class. The practice they were observing involved increasing student-to-student interactions while decreasing teacher talk. The team provided the teacher with feedback using a protocol and referred to the student checklist questions to drive the discussion. Next, they discussed lesson-alignment to the department goals, reinforced the lesson objective, and determined next instructional and curricular steps. Through the process, teachers shared best practices. A teacher explained and others agreed, "We grow each other's practice."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Multiple entry points are not consistently provided, and tasks and discussions are not always accessible to all students.

Impact

There is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and inconsistent demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in work products among all students including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff believes that students learn best when they are engaged in rigorous thinking through student-centered lessons that provide strategic grouping of students, clear expectations, and parallel teaching. To achieve this, the staff believes students learn when they are provided structured supports, such as annotations, leveled texts and graphic organizers. Yet, the implementation of these beliefs is inconsistently seen across classrooms.
- In some classes, the level of rigor and essential questions was high but inconsistent with the level of questions asked, while in others it lacked both rigor and higher-order questions. In an integrated co-teaching (ICT) ELA class, students read a commentary on Shakespeare after studying *The Tempest*. The essential question and task were rigorous; yet, the verbal questions asked by the co-teacher started at Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* 1 and 2 and did not spiral upwards to meet the task. For example, after reiterating the directions to different groups, a co-teacher posed, "What does this mean to you?" and "What is the relationship between these two characters?" which did not push higher-order thinking. On the other hand, in a history class for English Language Learners (ELLs), both the task and the questions held lower expectations. Students sat in large groups; one had the support of the English as a New Language teacher. Students read the tiered texts after watching a movie, and they were asked to simply identify two aspects of an important time frame in Chinese history which were directly presented in the movie. Students had an opportunity to pair-share without discussion protocols, and a few were selected to share with the whole class. However, their responses were given in incomplete sentences and were not corrected but were encouraged to continue if the student paused.
- In some classes, students were provided multiple entry points into the curriculum, while in others they were inconsistent. In an ICT science class, students were provided tiered worksheets, varied leveled graphic organizers, and data-determined groups to meet students' learning needs, plus a group placement rationale. Yet, in other classes, students may have been in groups, but they did not receive tiered materials, and the groups did not support their learning needs. In an integrated Algebra class, students sat together but worked individually without discussion. Discussion in groups varied across grades and subjects. In an ELA ICT class, students worked in groups to read, reread, and discuss an Alice Walker poem in order to find meaning and the literary devices the author utilized. However, in an ELL class, students worked in groups to write answers, and then they combined into groups with student leaders. Yet, students read their answers instead of holding a discussion. In a history class, the grouping was uneven with some students engaged and others disengaged and silent.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty adopted selected curricula to ensure that they are providing instruction aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and that the curricula and tasks consistently emphasize rigorous thinking and learning habits.

Impact

The school's adoption of this curriculum enables school-wide coherence and results in college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks provide opportunities for all students to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration and teacher leaders work collaboratively to adjust the Common Core-aligned programs they have chosen. *EngageNY* is used for English Language Arts and math, while they created their own curricula for science and social studies following the New York City Scope and Sequence. Additionally, the staff and administration analyzed data and determined the need to provide curricula for struggling readers which resulted in them implementing *Reading Plus*, an online, Common Core-aligned program.
- With a student population of 18% ELLs and 21% students with disabilities, school leaders, together with teachers, made the intentional decision to revise the schedule and the curricula to meet students' needs through ensuring additional ICT classes and providing students with rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills. As a result, teachers implement a parallel teaching structure that requires teachers to co-plan while ensuring that the curricula is engaging and accessible for all students. Lesson plans include strategic grouping with student names, skill levels, and rationale for working independently or in pairs. Modifications for special populations are thoughtfully made with attention to the teacher assigned and the type of adaptation to be used. For each marking period and unit, students are provided with a syllabus and rubrics to support their understanding of how they will be graded, thus demonstrating coherence across grades. A review of unit and daily lesson plans indicates that teachers plan with the end in mind. They determine the culminating or life-ready task, and then plan what students need to know and be able to do. In addition, staff has agreed to culminate at least two units using Socratic Seminar and have adopted common sentence-starters, graphic organizers, formal reflections, and other supports for student to use during and after the seminar.
- The staff has adopted common formats for their unit and daily plans using an online program for transparency and feedback that includes timed components such as essential and guiding questions, differentiated learning activities, key vocabulary, and exit tickets. These components are evident across grades and subjects. Each unit culminates with a life-ready task that provides students with an extended writing and reading activity where students apply their learning to a real-world situation to demonstrate the instructional shifts. As a school of the arts, all arts classes are held to the same high expectations. In the theater integration course, the life-ready task is "Students will create and perform a theatre piece that includes the spoken word and tableaux that reflect on their idea of 'home,'" while in English 6, it is "write an 8-page typed claim-based argument in the context of your non-fiction text, use textual evidence to support your position, create counter claims, and use citations."

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing their use of common assessments to measure student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers inconsistently used results to adjust curricula and instruction or make effective in-the-moment adjustments to lessons to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Checking for understanding varied from class to class. In several classes with students sitting in pairs or groups, teachers asked whole-class questions and accepted one or two responses, then moved on to the next step to analyze exponential functions or to continue reading about the Song dynasty. The opportunity to share or to make an adjustment to mid-lesson practice to meet student-learning needs was not in evidence. There were two instances of teachers checking for understanding. One occurred as the teacher used higher-order thinking questions requiring students to use text-based answers in an ELA class. The second took place in a social studies class; the teacher walked from group to group and determined that some had not found the sources of the articles and so brought the class together regarding expectations for the assignment, determining a need to make an adjustment addressing all students. However, this was not consistently implemented across the classes visited. Further, there was no direct evidence that teachers collected data on student responses and group work during the lesson to adjust future instruction.
- Teacher teams have developed common interim assessments that are aligned to the curricula. Although teacher team agendas show that staff analyze data to determine next instructional and curricula steps, there is little evidence that this re-teaching has resulted in progress toward goals across grades and subjects. Although some teachers provided examples of using student work to inform instruction and curricula, there is uneven evidence that teachers across grades and subjects use student data from common assessments to inform next instructional steps. Additionally, the results do not demonstrate a comparative increase of student mastery, but there was anecdotal improvement for a handful of students without analysis of growth. Further, outside of the WITsi analysis, teachers provided raw, unanalyzed data from common assessments.
- Evidence of collecting and analyzing WITsi data is indicated in teacher team meeting minutes. For example, an analysis of grade 11 ELA data shows two cycles of inquiry conducted, changes in the number of students in the targeted group from 11 to 8 students, and a focus change from "so" to "therefore." However, the grade team determined that the data was not reflective of their students. As a result, teachers determined that they moved into paragraphs too soon and did not complete the cycle with fidelity. Therefore, the WITsi assessment data was not being collected consistently or used to adjust curricula across the grade as evidenced in grade team notes.
- A couple of teachers presented an analysis of data in a report providing evidence of impact. A teacher's report shows different methods of data collection using a comparison from interim assessment 1 and 3 comparing student standards mastery for two questions and using gaps to inform instruction through the "do now." However, no final result of improved mastery comparison is provided, nor is this analysis evident across grades and subjects.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

High expectations are consistently communicated to staff via the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, training, and ongoing communication. The school communicates expectations to students and families and keeps them abreast of student progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact

The school maintains a system of accountability toward expectations amongst staff and helps families understand student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration provides staff with consistent messages regarding expectations through a daily newsletter called *Word in the Yard*. Administration delineated school goals, expectations for co-teaching, unit and lesson planning, assessing student work, grading policy, demonstration of mastery, course syllabi, and professional development in teacher teams in the staff handbook and reiterated them in various memos. Additionally, the administration provided teachers the protocol to create unit plans using the Understanding by Design model, life-ready tasks, and rubrics.
- In addition to the weekly parent engagement via phone, email, text, or in-person meetings, staff also communicate with the home through an online grade book and parent and student portal called *PupilPath*. Students stated that they check *PupilPath* at least once a week. One student stated that she always checks it after a big assignment. Parents shared that they are very pleased with the level of communication from the teachers and administration.
- Parents shared the strong support they receive with the college selection process. Workshops, college fairs, and tours are provided to help students to get a better sense of college life. The guidance counselor and senior advisor help them with the completion of the financial aid and college applications. Parents pointed out that the tours included not just local schools, but overnight trips to colleges outside of New York City. Students agreed that the school really helps to prepare them for college and career and was enthusiastic about the daily life ready tasks and the “Life-Ready Course” that is part of the school’s program. Additionally, counselors and advisors meet with students to discuss if they are on track for graduation, completion of Regents exams, college applications, and financial aid. One student stated and others agreed, “The college counseling is really good here, and I know because my paid internship is to work alongside them in the building.” Career trips to businesses are provided yearly. Art students are required to participate in “art sharings” where a forum is provided to showcase their work to family and friends.