



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Academy for Personal Leadership and Excellence

Middle School X363

**120 East 184 Street
Bronx
NY 10468**

Principal: Angelo Ledda

**Date of review: April 19, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop**

The School Context

Academy for Personal Leadership and Excellence is a middle school with 456 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 12% Black, 85% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 32% English Language Learners and 23% students with disabilities. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.1%.

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	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	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	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provides clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance supports.

Impact

Successful partnerships with families support student progress toward college and career readiness. All students, including high need subgroups, own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Students report receiving feedback and guidance on a regular basis and using Skedula, a school management portal, to inform their ownership of their learning experience. A student stated, “Teachers motivate me and are preparing me for high school and college by giving me harder work.” Another student explained, “I’m being challenged in all my classes to develop my thinking process and be a critical thinker.” Guidance counselors introduce the expectations of college and career readiness via meetings explaining the high school articulation process to students and assisting families with the application process. Students also attend an annual trip to New York University to expose them to a college environment experience. Students use the self-assessment and standard tracking sheets that they receive on a weekly basis from their teachers to ensure they are prepared for their respective next levels. The trackers are included in each unit across content areas and measure student comprehension of each standard based on specific assessment criteria. At the end of each unit, students are able to see how they have progressed throughout the unit based on their weekly scores and teacher conferences. A seventh grade student commented, “We all have the potential to do well. We know what we’ve made progress in and what we’ve mastered.”
- Parents communicated to school leadership that they wanted opportunities for teachers to learn more strategies to support students in the Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) program for students with autism spectrum disorders and to increase their own knowledge base of how to support their children at home both academically and emotionally. As a result, school leaders provide training specifically for teachers and parents of these students. Parents added that they now use resources from *EngageNY* at home. Parents asserted that the success of this program speaks to the partnership they have with school leaders. One parent stated that, “the school always listens to us.”
- The school and families come together to host a monthly family night where parents and faculty decide on the agenda for each meeting. Recently, the principal met with families and posted the following on the school’s website: “It is with great pleasure and much pride that I announce Middle School 363 is now a school in good standing as designated by New York State. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the staff and students and the partnership with the parents.”

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts.

Impact

Opportunities for discourse are built into lessons and student work products and most discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The school community believes students learn best when given choice in task selection, are guided by teachers, and engage in high quality discussions. Teachers use Socratic Seminar during lessons as an instructional approach to strengthen peer-to-peer conversation. In an English as a New Language (ENL) lesson, the essential question, “How can authors use their voices as a vehicle for change?” immersed students in peer-to-peer conversation with the use of accountable talk stems for some students. Students stated whether they agreed or disagreed with their peers and challenged each other to support their responses with evidence from the text. There was a checklist on the board to remind students of the Socratic Seminar expectations, which students referenced when asked about the responsibility and purpose of the inner and outer circles.
- During an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, the lesson’s objective was to engage students in a Socratic Seminar to analyze two texts, *World Wonders Worn Down?* and *Tyler Armstrong* from various angles and perspectives. The student pairs asked and responded to questions generated during the previous day’s lesson. The teachers encouraged students to think of as many accountable talk stems as they could and reminded them to engage respectfully in conversation during the seminar while agreeing, disagreeing, commenting, or seeking clarification. In another class, Socratic Seminar took place with students seated in the inner and outer circle structure. Students engaged in the discussion using familiar protocols and utilized accountable talk stems. However, there were a few students in the outer circle who were unclear about their role and did not fully engage in the discussion.
- A math ICT lesson focused on the use of a graphing calculator to compute rate of change for linear equations also involved students in turning and talking to each other and defending their answers. Some of the questioning by the teacher resulted in yes or no responses from a few students. Students utilized the school’s target cards to indicate their understanding of the task and the teacher provided clarification when needed. However, in a few cases, there were missed opportunities to acknowledge and address misunderstandings in order to enhance participation.
- Students in a social studies class focused on the essential question, “How did the flooding of the Nile River contribute to the growth of agriculture and culture in Egypt?” They looked at three images on an interactive white board and asked to choose one image that captured their interest and write everything that came to mind when thinking of the image. Students then shared their thoughts with their partner, supported with reasoning. The lesson included leveled texts on pharaohs, mummies, and pyramids.

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 Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Coherence to promote college and career readiness is evident for all students. Individual and groups of students, including the lowest and highest achieving students have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers refined the curricula during the summer of 2015 based on State assessment data from the previous school year. They identified trends in the performance of high needs students on State standards and focused on anchor standards to address their students' deficiencies. For example, in English Language Arts (ELA), teachers determined they wanted to deepen student engagement with complex texts and critical analysis. As a result, lesson and unit plans were revised to include more leveled tasks and activities ranging from levels one through four of Webb's *Depth of Knowledge*. In math, teachers added additional word problems and reduced the amount of routine practice drills. Additionally, teachers incorporate opportunities for students to choose tasks thus increasing their cognitive engagement.
- The school's Nest program includes curricula focused on social development for their students with autism. It fosters receptive and expressive language skills through organization of their thoughts through writing and becoming more active listeners while accessing the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers report that the impact of this curriculum is observable in improved student interactions with peers and faculty and by higher achievement as shown in report card grades.
- Across grades and content areas, unit maps include color codes that indicate real-time edits and revisions, as well as removal of tasks based upon student performance and teacher reflections. A teacher reflected on a grade six science lesson on the differentiation between biotic and abiotic factors noting that engagement was high and "exit tickets showed high mastery." Social studies unit plans were revised to increase the focus on vocabulary acquisition and to provide additional opportunities for students to discuss concepts before writing activities.
- The school's goal during the summer break was learning how to make their students better readers and mathematicians. As a result of aligning their math and ELA curricula to the Common Core Standards, student Lexile and math assessment levels improved schoolwide, including sub-groups, students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). One teacher said, "During the previous school year, we were touching the standards on a surface level, and not going deeply into the anchor standards, and this year we have really gone in depth." Another teacher commented, "As a middle school teacher, you don't necessarily think you have to teach reading because you expect middle school students to come to you on grade level and that just wasn't the case, so we had to ensure our curricula met our students where they were at the beginning of the year."

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. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Actionable feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Assessment data is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers discuss student progress toward promotion, focusing on Lexile levels for each student for each marking period as it relates to students performing at, below, or above grade level. Furthermore, teachers look at the total percentage of Lexile levels for the entire school and then disaggregate the data by grade houses. Additionally, teachers conference with all students to ensure they are aware of their Lexile levels and their progress or decline as it relates to grade level standards. During the student interview, students knew their Lexile levels and what they need to do in order to improve. School wide, as of marking period two, 23.7% of students are on grade level compared to marking period one where 7.9% of students scored on grade level.
- Teachers track the proficient levels of English Language Learners (ELLs) in all grades from newcomer and entering levels to expanding and commanding levels. Data from baseline to midline assessments show that 75 percent of sixth grade ELLs improved at least one level, and 58 percent of all ELLs schoolwide increased their language acquisition level. Both teachers and school leadership attribute this growth to their focus on formative assessments, exit tickets, Saturday academy, and their encouragement for students to reflect on their learning and have the opportunity to re-test and increase their mastery levels.
- Most student work included feedback attached to a rubric to guide students. However, feedback on some student work was not always actionable and meaningful to provide a portrait of student mastery. For example, an opinion-writing outline included "Good try! Try to use the prompts more to help you write. I will try to help you too. Thanks for trying." A teacher noted on a math assessment dealing with quadratic relationships, "You clearly answered parts A and B. Now, consider another approach you can take to find the number of blocks in stage 10." Student work did include a peer feedback process that students stated they found to be useful for improving the quality of their writing, especially on essays.

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

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership.

Impact

Shared improvements in teacher practice result in mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers utilize a student work analysis document to guide their team conversations and plans for re-teaching, if necessary, that asks the following: “What did the student demonstrate they knew?”, “What misconceptions did the student have about the task?”, and “What additional instructional strategies/differentiation/scaffolding would assist the student with the task?”
- Teams use video recordings and the accompanying transcripts among colleagues to improve upon their collective practice. A review of a transcript for a grade 7 team showcased a teacher-student conference, which included the student’s Lexile level and the equivalent reading level. For example, the student shown in the video had a Lexile level of 750 and was on a grade 5 reading level. The goal of the video series across grades was to increase reading interest and levels. As a result, teachers have incorporated additional reading selections for students to choose from in their units and literacy levels are improving school-wide. During the first marking period, 7% of students were on grade level whereas during the second marking period, 23% of students were on grade level and 15%, above grade level. “As a middle school teacher, you don’t necessarily think you have to teach reading because you expect students will enter school on grade level. When we began to look at Lexile levels, we realized we all had to become teachers of literacy. This was a huge takeaway for us,” stated a teacher.
- Teachers acknowledge there are leadership structures in place that allow them to take on leadership roles that lead to student achievement. For example, the seventh grade teacher team began using electronic tablets and recommended all students have access to the technology tool and this has now grown school-wide. Additionally, the target cards, which allow for student self-assessment, started in one class and the idea was brought to the leadership team and was approved and rolled-out in all classrooms. “This is a leadership factory,” stated a faculty member.
- A teacher referenced a career day proposal that was presented to and approved by the principal. It resulted in 30 different careers represented at the event, which resulted in students feeling empowered and understanding the importance of having a strong academic foundation. Teachers agreed that the event had a direct correlation on student performance and stamina. “We have worked very hard to become a school in good standing and will continue to do so,” declared a teacher.