



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Academy for Language and Technology**

**High School X365**

**1700 Macombs Road  
Bronx  
NY 10453**

**Principal: José Viñales**

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

## The School Context

Academy for Language and Technology is a high school with 312 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 0% Asian, 0% Black, 100% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 66% English Language Learners and 3% 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 91.7%.

## 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	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	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

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

All teachers are engaged in collaborative inquiry-based professional development teams. Distributive leadership structures afford teachers and teams the opportunity to make key decisions about teaching and learning through the analysis and revision of curriculum and student work.

### Impact

The work, frequency, and variation of teacher teams provide all teachers with opportunities to engage in shared leadership and professional collaboration resulting in improved teacher capacity and student mastery of goals across the school community.

### Supporting Evidence

- A vast majority of teachers agreed that the lesson study has led to their professional growth as well as improved student achievement. Teachers stated that they have seen growth in several areas to date. One example is from the implementation of the schoolwide reading comprehension and annotation rubrics whereby students self- and peer-assess. Teachers added that determining the central idea of a text that has been a schoolwide area for growth, focused across grades and subjects, with students demonstrating growth between the Design Your Own (DYO) Assessment 1 and DYO2 showing an increase of 20% for all students, including students with special needs and English as a New Language (ENL). After the first DYO assessment students create goals with teacher support, and then revisit those goals after the second DYO assessment to determine “if they made their goal and if not, what do we need to continue working on so that they can achieve it and this reflective goal setting is evident in their folios.” To support student achievement, teachers agreed that their teacher team collaborations are “at the heart of the growth” for students and themselves. Teachers have opportunities to attend lesson clinics to support their curricula planning and revisions with a mentor. A teacher stated and others agreed that they learn from each other in a collegial environment “seeing huge growth in our planning and instruction with more precise scaffolding and differentiation and best practices.”
- All teachers meet in multiple collaborative team meetings, including grade, content, and department heads. Teams use different protocols and share their focus on curricula development and revisions based on student data and work. After sharing with a partner the partner then provides actionable feedback and areas of growth about alignment to the content and Common Core Learning Standards and then the partners switch roles. Teachers stated, “This meeting allows us time to give feedback on lessons, share strategies, and after implementing them, discuss successes and next steps, and the cycle continues for all courses.” Teachers demonstrated using data from the DYO assessments to determine student growth toward their goals. When asked about focused groups of students, teachers stated, “Our whole school works with ELLs daily so we provide visuals and differentiated instruction and now focus on tier 3 students, giving them more rigorous questioning and have them think critically through refined tasks.”
- Distributive leadership is embedded in the school. A teacher leader, often the instructional coach, facilitates each teacher team meeting and is part of the administrative cabinet. Additionally, staff create, plan, and implement the professional development sessions for each other. Although these are valuable, teachers stated that their team meetings are the best professional development they have ever had, because of the shared trust to learn.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, pedagogy is aligned to curricula and demonstrates shared schoolwide beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching practices reflect strategically provided multiple entry points and supports to curricula for all learners, but the deepening of discussions to further elevate levels of student thinking and extensions was not always evident.

### Impact

The coherence of teacher beliefs supports all students to be engaged in cognitively challenging tasks across classrooms that are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and discussions at the team and school levels, demonstrating higher-order thinking skills in student work products. However, teacher implementation of discussion strategies and protocols illustrated missed opportunities for even higher-level reflective discourse amongst students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The schoolwide coherent belief that students learn best when their needs are met through providing multiple entry points and differentiation, rigorous tasks with higher-order thinking questions that engage students in deep discussions, was consistently evident throughout the classroom visits. Students were involved in their learning through small group and whole group discussions with students using their discussion rubric in U.S. History, Advanced Placement (AP) Environmental Science, as well as demonstration of deep ownership with student-led classes that were evident in a Socratic Seminar and a student-led explication and discussion in AP U.S. History. Students had opportunities to pair-share and discuss their thoughts prior to whole class discussions so they could demonstrate their thought processes. All students were engaged, as they were the ones doing the work. However, although opportunities for discussions occurred in the across classes, opportunities for deeper discussions to ensure further challenge and extensions for higher-level students were not evident across the vast majority of classes.
- In the vast majority of classes students were provided strategic multiple entry points and differentiated tasks or readings to provide intentionally supportive scaffolds for students who are mostly learning English. These instructional strategies include but are not limited to Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) strategies, academic vocabulary acquisition strategies that include word walls, choral response, total physical response, personal word banks, and close reading using annotation. These were observed in English as a Second Language (ESL), Global, U.S. History, AP U.S. History, Algebra 1, and AP Environmental Science. Students also used their annotation rubric to check their own use.
- Across the vast majority of classes, students were engaged in pairs or groups that were data-determined. Students worked in both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups based on the task. For example, in an ESL Global class, students needed multiple levels of students' language proficiency and content or background knowledge to complete the task, so students were grouped heterogeneously and provided roles so that all students were engaged. Students know their own reading levels and goals as well as why they are placed in different groups, taking ownership of their learning.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The school creates and adapts rich, cohesive curricula in all content areas that is consistently reflected upon and refined to address the needs of all learners and incorporates ever-increasing levels of rigor.

### Impact

The school's commitment to analyzing student work and revising units of study to maximize coherence and to meet all student needs has resulted in a seamless educational experience for students that causes them to think deeply, make connections among and between subjects, prepare them for the next levels of their education, and promotes college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The staff prides itself on the creation of coherent curricula that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and state content standards. To assess the quality of their own curricula, the staff uses the "Tri-State Rubric for Lessons and Units." To support staff in this curricula work, administration provides ongoing training to staff to be able to create, refine, and adjust curricula using student work and data, and to empower them to make strategic decisions to ensure that the curricula is aligned to the Common Core, instructional shifts, and state content standards. Not only does the staff align the curricula to the Common Core and state standards, but as a Career and Technical Education school that provides two pathways, Media Communications and Computer Science, for all students to achieve a certificate upon graduation, the curricula design is aligned to Monroe College's curricula. Each student graduates with one of these two Microsoft Certificates, promoting college and career readiness for all.
- Reflection is a schoolwide practice. In the spring of last year, the English department conducted a deep analysis of the data, and determined a need for more rigorous material and so adopted the *HMH Collections Core Curricula* across grades. To this end they have found an increase of 20% from the first DYO assessment to the second for all students, showing that all students have access to the tasks and are cognitively engaged. Even with the challenge of employing a new program, staff has ensured that the learnings from the QTEL training are coherently implemented across the school's curricula. The staff reflects after each lesson that helps them to refine, revise, and readjust lessons, tailoring them to students' needs and to focus on student learning outcomes. From this reflective work, teachers determine additional supports, scaffolds, extensions, and groupings for students to engage them in the curricula and meet the intended goals.
- The instructional specialist collects all unit plans before the beginning of each term to provide actionable feedback on coherence, alignment to the Common Core, and to the focus areas of the Danielson *Framework for Learning*, questioning and discussion. Then teachers collaborate to refine based on a continuous review of student work and data to determine how best to support student learning and achievement.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Across all classrooms, teachers and students use a variety of formative and summative assessments and checking for understanding practices aligned to the school's curricula that offers a broad picture of students' strengths and areas for growth. Teachers use common assessments and track student progress across grades and content areas.

### Impact

All teachers use this variety of data to provide students with meaningful actionable feedback, so all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery, and teachers make informed decisions that impact student progress across all classrooms. Teachers adjust curricular and instructional decisions based on data to meet students' learning needs and students are aware of their next steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school employs *Datacation*, with portals for teachers, students, and parents called *Skedula*, an online grade book tool and email service. Each student's attendance, coursework, progress within each course, Regents, credits earned and those still needed, demonstrate a clear portrait of student mastery and progress toward graduation. For example, a student stated that she has the *Skedula* application on her phone, and she emailed her teacher, "If I see something below a 95, I don't like it; so, I redo it or attend after school sessions so I can understand the part that I got wrong." Each student's *Skedula* page uses color-coding to show task submitted, status of grading including rubric score, or awaiting grade. Students keep track of their tasks and grades. Parents stated they sign in to the parent portal, and track their children's progress, using it as a lever for conversation to help support their children's work toward graduation.
- Using a backward planning model, the staff determines what they want students to know and be able to do and then create DYO assessments in alignment with the curricula maps across subjects and grades. After each DYO, teachers provide actionable feedback and students write metacognitive reflections about their results, naming actions they can improve upon for the next assessment.
- Schoolwide, staff uses several techniques for Assessment for Learning, referred by the staff as AFL, or formative checks for understanding during a lesson. There are several that are schoolwide, including a stoplight method of checking for understanding where the stoplight-colored flipcharts are attached to the desks. Students respond with ease, as they know the routine. Other checks for understanding include think-write-pair share and pair-share/whole class-share. Teachers use the results of checks for understanding to make adjustments in the moment, adjusting content to support student achievement. Additionally, teachers use the results of these varied ongoing checks for understanding to revise lessons and student groupings, as well as to refer students to after school and Saturday tutoring, academic intervention services, and to their mentor, a teacher who supports academic achievement.
- Students stated they have rubrics for tasks and assessments as well as for in-class discussions and annotation, two schoolwide areas of focus incorporating rigorous student-to-student discussion and close-reading using annotation skills. Teachers explained that these rubrics help students to peer- and self-assess. Students have a "Datafolio" that contains all his/her data, SMART goals setting and tracking, progress trackers, and data reflections to track and own their achievement.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders communicate to staff, and teachers engage in high-quality collaborative learning opportunities establishing a culture of professionalism and effectively communicate expectations of college and career readiness to families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

### Impact

The entire staff takes ownership of their professional growth demonstrating a culture of mutual accountability, and partners with families, fostering their participation in support for their children's progress by providing ongoing feedback. Students own their educational experience, successfully achieve high expectations, and are prepared for the next level on a path to college and career.

### Supporting Evidence

- Parents stated they are highly pleased with the consistent communication with staff, which ensures their children receive what they need to graduate, whether it is about attendance or achievement, or applying to college. Parents agreed *Skedula* helps them know where their children are succeeding or need help, the number of credits earned, or additional needs to graduate. Parents are familiar with the certification programs and college credits earned at Monroe College because families attend orientation when entering the school.
- To support student exploration of college and career opportunities, the college/career counselor and mentors support students through a curriculum that helps students to find their strengths and areas of career interest, and supports students through college surveys and trips. Families attend one-to-one sessions, college fairs or workshops on the college application process, obtaining financial aid, and scholarship applications. Students spoke about meeting with the college counselor who supports them in the process and in selecting colleges and making sure that the schools are a good fit.
- Students own their learning as evidenced by their creation of reflective goals after DY0 assessments. Teachers guide students and provide actionable feedback toward their progress, and then students write a reflection based on this metacognitive exercise. Additionally, students meet with their mentor and develop specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and timely (SMART) goals, and then attend follow-up meetings monthly to check on that progress and note it in a log, teaching students college and career readiness skills.
- Teachers set individual goals toward professional growth aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* in the areas of questioning and discussion and student engagement. These goals are also tied to monthly professional development opportunities displayed in a yearly plan, which are aligned to the schoolwide goals of increasing one proficiency level on the New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Test (NYSESLAT) and increasing the pass rate for the ELA Regents' exam. To ensure implementation of these new learnings, administration and the instructional specialist, consistently observe classes to focus on the implementation of new techniques learned during professional development, and provide actionable feedback. This feedback is evident in teacher observations, both informal and formal as noted in *Advance*.