



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Fordham High School for the Arts

High School X437

**500 East Fordham Road
Bronx
NY 10458**

Principal: Iris Blige

**Date of review: March 15, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop**

The School Context

Fordham High School for the Arts is a high school with 380 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 34% Black, 61% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 29% of the students enrolled and girls account for 71%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.6%.

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

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that systematically analyze teacher and student work and assessment data, strengthening teacher instructional capacity and promoting the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards.

Impact

A focus on analysis of data and shared practice result in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners, improvement in teacher practice, and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaborate on an on-going basis in department teams and across content areas, which is resulting in improved teacher practice. Teachers work together to provide feedback to each other through learning walks, lesson study, and video clubs. Teachers reported, “the videos have helped us to grow because we are actually looking at execution of strategies and getting feedback from our colleagues.” A science teacher highlighted their focus on the use of student protocols and structures they’re using to promote student engagement and participation in a meaningful way. A first year teacher commented, “Through the video club, I learned not to direct the class discussion from the front of the room. Now I facilitate the conversation from different parts of the room.” Teachers agree the video club has been useful in encouraging them to reflect on their practice and bring their learnings directly to their classrooms.
- Mastery Connect, a data platform through which teachers effectively assess the Common Core, monitor student performance, and report student mastery to families and administrators has provided teachers with the tools to identify target areas of challenge for students. In English language arts (ELA), the teacher team identified students were struggling with text analysis and creating claims and counter claims in their writing. Teachers began using student checklists that included sentence starters to support students which has resulted in the school improving incoming proficiency levels and pass rates in ELA regents exams and in closing of the achievement gap for English Language Learners (ELL’s), Students with disabilities (SWD’s), and the City’s lowest performing students, according to the 2014-15 New York City Department of Education’s School Quality Snapshot.
- The Creative Arts teacher team expressed the impact the teacher’s collective focus is having on student’s writing and how they’re using the Common Core ELA standards to inform their work in order to increase school wide instructional coherence. They’ve noticed an improvement in the use of academic vocabulary and structure; stating, “Students are now generating their own checklists and making necessary revisions to their work and checking their own progress.”

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

Impact

While student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and ownership across grades and classes, participation of all students, varied.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership and teachers believe students learn best and achieve when they are in an inclusive settings that provides multiple entry points, appropriate supports, and choice in selecting their own learning topics. During an Advanced Placement (AP) ELA lesson, students were grouped heterogeneously by theme and their most recent midterm data. Each student came prepared with a quote from their assigned texts and analysis of the quote, and engaged in peer-to-peer discussion. The conversations amongst students promoted a student centered and teacher facilitated environment where analysis, synthesis of information and academic discussion was evident via the use of the Four C's discussion protocol. Whereas in a social studies class, the teacher directed the lesson; students were engaged in questions that focused on closed-ended questions such as "Do you have any evidence?" During the whole class discussion, not all students participated and for some of the students who did participate, the teacher explained their responses and student voice and ownership of the lesson was reduced.
- During a grade 11 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) lesson, the essential questions included, "How is the burden of responsibility to society, the country and the world reflected in American policies?" and "Is government action necessary for equality in American society?" Students were in two different groups in an effort to engage in a *Socratic Seminar* discussion. Students were expected to strengthen their arguments on equality in the United States using the *Socratic Seminar* discussion format and multiple primary and secondary resources. Students used different graphic organizers to support their thinking while teachers circulated the room collecting data via checklists. As some students struggled with their answers, the teachers did not provide a response and encouraged students to seek support from their peers. While most students participated and were able to capture and write their thoughts on their three strongest pieces of evidence and a potential challenge question, some students had blank papers and did not engage in the discussion.
- A visual arts class centered on the essential question, "How do we tell a visual story and make our artistic journey evident to an audience?" focused on students making connections, engaging in academic discourse and pushing each other's thinking. Student statements included, "When I look at her artwork, there is one piece that doesn't seem to connect to her concentration." and "I think there is risk-taking in the story of the work because I see the technique, the brushstrokes, and it's abstract work." The teacher facilitated the lesson and infused questions to expand upon student comments such as, "I see we're still struggling with the theme of this artistic journey. If had to give it a title, what would it be?" which opened the conversation while still remaining focused on the lesson's essential question.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

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

There is coherence across grades and subject areas so that individual and groups of students have access to curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging and promote college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The faculty's curricular focus has been to ensure alignment of rigorous units and lessons while adhering to the Common Core and instructional shifts. Teachers used the Tri-State rubric to assess their unit plans using the Understanding by Design model and have worked to ensure vertical alignment across the four-year curricula in all content areas, including the fine and performing arts. A review of a "Transformations" unit task charged students with creating a projection of costs, revenue, and profits of managing either a Dunkin Donuts or Starbucks business. Students had to create a proposal using functions to determine their budget and transformations to make predictions based on business scenarios. The next steps included write a letter to an investor to persuade them to invest their company. In addition, the unit task guided students to follow the systematic guide to assist them with creating their own functions and applying transformations.
- The ELA department connects their unit planning dates to their scope and sequence, which they purposefully structure to meet the needs of student expectations throughout the year. For example, in the beginning of the school year, student Regents and Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) data is examined to identify which standards will be focused on in their units and then connected to texts from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt curricula while using a rubric to guide their selections and planning. In the middle of the school year, teachers decided to focus on literary analysis and incorporated close reading techniques from *Kyleen Beers*, in addition to hands-on activities. During the spring semester, teachers begin examining college essay topics, reading sample college essays for inspiration, and to expose students to style, technique, and uniqueness resulting in a successful college essay.
- Math teachers commented, "The tasks we design for our higher performing students are based on student data. We use leveled practice, and based on what students are answering correctly, determine the group and mastery tasks they receive. Students who have achieved mastery in Algebra 2, are given questions that are above a Regents exam level. Additionally, these students are able to assist their peers with their thinking".
- Faculty engages in a three-phase curricula development revision cycle. Phase one focuses on calibration in which all lead teachers share units of study and accompanying lessons and materials with their respective departments and feedback is provided based on the use of the Tri-State rubric. In phase two, staff members are tasked with presenting their updated unit maps with accompanying lesson plans that incorporates feedback from the phase one cycle. The final phase, centers on contribution and completes the curriculum revision cycle. As a result, teachers have seen increased consistency in the work of their students.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use common or created assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned with the school’s curricula that offer a clear portrait of student mastery. The faculty uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, track progress and adjust curricular and instructional decisions.

Impact

Assessment data provide actionable and meaningful feedback to all students and teachers regarding student achievement so that all students, including ELL’s and SWD’s demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers utilize Mastery Connect to ensure all learners are not only meeting college and career expectations, but also exceeding them so they are academically prepared once enrolled in college. The on-line platform has allowed teachers to develop clear learning targets based on common assessment results from mock Regents exams across content areas.
- Teachers are provided with an assessment calendar at the start of the school year which includes fall and spring midterm and final exams, AP assessments, January and June Regents exams, and PSAT and SAT assessment dates for each cohort.
- At the start of the school year, teachers and school leaders reviewed the fall 2015 scholarship, which highlighted the percentage of students passing across content areas that revealed visual arts with the highest pass rate of 96% and math with a pass rate of 83%. The staff also reviewed cohort course pass/fail percentages and used the data to track both departmental goals and student progress of mastery levels, which informed their curricula revisions. Teachers used the data to inform their focus on writing across the content areas and grades, as an example. The data revealed students were citing evidence but were struggling with making inferences, expressive language, and synthesis of the information.
- The faculty uses assessment analysis reflection forms to guide their next steps as they monitor and track student progress. Teachers document how they’ve prepared students for formative and summative assessments, identify which concepts and skills students have difficulty with and specifically target instructional priorities that have emerged from the review of student work and data. As noted in a teacher’s reflection document, “After reviewing the data on Mastery Connect, there were several instructional priorities that came about. Students were unable to determine the meaning of words through text and could not describe social, political, or economic events through history.”
- Students receive feedback via checklists, rubrics, and conferencing. Students who perform below mastery levels are provided with intervention support directly from their content area of teachers. Included in departmental plans is an excel mastery tracker that contains assessment data for school and state, percentage of content standards covered and percentage of mastery levels. Teachers meet with students at least three times per semester to review their individual benchmark assessment data.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of expectations for all students.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability where school staff provides clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance supports to ensure that all students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are provided with a school handbook that communicates the high expectations established by the school community including academic eligibility guidelines that state the acceptable level of academic achievement, behavioral expectations, graduation requirements per cohort, and a section on “How college is different from high school?” A student stated, I know I will have to do a tremendous amount of writing in college and the feedback I’m receiving on essays is preparing me for the writing I will be expected to do. For example, I needed to provide evidence when using informational text and I wasn’t. Now I am and I see the improvements in my grades.” The student handbook also includes a section focused on key features of college writing and honing in on what qualifies as a good claim with examples from Socrates’ argument in *The Apology*, *Native Son*, and *Heart of Darkness*.
- The leadership team, guidance, college and career counselor, and teachers emphasize the importance of college and career readiness in their “Going Green is Commendable, but Striving for blue is exceptional” campaign. The school currently has a 91% 4-year graduation rate, which is above the city and borough averages that are 70% and 62%, respectively. Students are provided with the criteria for being “green” which results in a Regents diploma whereas, going “blue” results in an advanced Regents diploma, chancellor’s arts endorsed diploma, and fulfillment of CUNY admissions requirement and proficiency standards without remediation classes. A student highlighted that she was color coded “blue” in ELA which indicated she was performing well and “ready for college!” however, a student with a disability stated, “I didn’t have any areas of blue but did have red color-coded areas and thought it was embarrassing which I have discussed with my guidance counselor.” The school leadership team also commented that this is an issue they are concerned with and are working on next steps.
- Teachers are provided with instructional expectations via staff memo and faculty handbook, which includes a unit template, The Framework for Great Schools, and Universal Design for Learning guidelines with implementation examples. The staff holds each other accountable via school learning walks as they believe and stated, “The talent is here. We learn from each other.” Teachers have focused and continue to teach and build upon using less teacher voice and increased student directed lessons in which students are driving the conversations and asking their own questions. The use of question and discussion protocols and connecting the work of the teacher video club and learning walks to the school’s inquiry work with a balance of support and supervision from the school’s leadership team has resulted in teacher’s confidence to take risks in their classrooms. A faculty member commented, “We feel empowered because we’re not only looking at our content areas, we’re going deeper into pedagogy so we know the right teacher moves to make in our classrooms.”