



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

New Explorers High School

High School X547

**730 Concourse Village West
Bronx
NY 10451**

Principal: Lisa Luft

**Date of review: April 7, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Deborah Burnett-Worthy**

The School Context

New Explorers High School is a high school with 429 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 28% Black, 70% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 27% students with disabilities. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 80.9%.

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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leader and faculty decisions ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Access to the curricula is designed to cognitively engage a variety of students while promoting their preparation for college and careers.

Supporting Evidence

- *EngageNY* for math, *Springboard* for English, and the New York City Scope and Sequence for science and social studies are the chosen curricula because of their alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and inclusion of instructional shifts. Teacher modifications in collaboration with a Generation Ready coach provide additional support for all students.
- It is evident that students are prepared for college and careers because they perform tasks included in selected curricula that emphasize rigorous habits and require higher-order thinking skills. In the living environment unit on the scientific method, all learners are required to generate hypotheses, design scientific experiments, gather, organize and graph data, identify trends based on organized experimental data, and formulate conclusions based on experimental data. The earth science curriculum requires all learners to describe and analyze apparent motion of the sun over the course of one year, compare and contrast solar and lunar eclipses, categorize different methods to determine size and shape, articulate points on earth using longitude and latitude, and draw maps.
- Academic tasks and curricular adjustments are consistently planned and refined using student work and data as documented by the tracking sheets that are used as a part of the Writing is Thinking through Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) writing curriculum. Across subjects, student progress on focused writing skills is closely monitored by staff members who then amend the curriculum based on what the data has revealed. A review of student work in global history, geometry, algebra and English classes revealed that the step one writing skill, using the term “because” to prompt writing, was mastered by nine out of ten students. Curriculum maps and lesson plans were adjusted to move to the step two skill, using the term “but” as a writing prompt. A review of this skill revealed that students were not ready to move on to step three, using the writing prompt, “so”. Adjustments were made to curriculum maps to reteach this skill before moving on.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices and student tasks are becoming aligned to the curricula and are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Across classrooms, there are uneven levels of teacher questions, student thinking, and student participation.

Impact

Some students are exposed to rigorous tasks that require them to demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation. Students also experience inconsistent levels of engagement.

Supporting Evidence

- Although the living environment teacher reviewed vocabulary and checked for understanding before the lab on genetic engineering, opportunities to clarify misconceptions and have students learn from each other were missed. While reviewing the vocabulary terms chromosomes, genes and traits, a student's confusion with one of the terms became apparent. Although the teacher did question the student in an attempt to guide him to the correct understanding of the term, the questions were low level and did not reveal if his misconception was corrected. The opportunity for his classmates to contribute to this discussion were also missed.
- A social studies teacher required students to answer a data-based question aligned with material students will need for the Global Studies Regents exam later this year. However, the teacher did not remind students to support their claims with evidence from the text, which was a missed opportunity to reinforce academic rigor in the class discussions.
- An English teacher and a special education teacher presented a rigorous task requiring students to annotate text. However, a teacher tried to elicit the term imagery by prompting students by saying, "It's a word that starts with an 'i,'" thus lowering the level of critical thinking and discussion.
- There is a trend of increasing rigor in teaching practices and tasks for students. One teacher conducted a fishbowl discussion in grade 10 social studies class and students in an English class made inferences to establish a theme and draw conclusions. In a geometry class, the teacher asked a series of questions to explain the word, dilation. Using familiar references such as, "dilated pupils" and "dilated cervix," the teacher elicited the connection to making something wider or larger and then guided students to graph the dilation of a geometric figure. The teacher facilitated student discovery, accessed prior knowledge, and challenged students' critical thinking skills which was one sign of alignment with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Teachers and students receive limited feedback regarding student achievement. Effective adjustments are beginning to be made to meet student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Although rubrics that are in alignment with the school curricula can be found on display with student work in some classrooms, the feedback that accompanies most work is not consistently actionable. For example, a math teacher stated, "Your definition is an incomplete sentence. List more facts." The grow on a geometry assignment was, "6 proportions."
- General education and special education teachers monitored student discussion and notetaking to check for student understanding in an Integrated Co-teaching class. One-on-one and small group conferences were also used to assess student comprehension. These practices were inconsistently observed across grade and content areas.
- A global history teacher urged a student to be more specific when using the terms since and therefore in a short response assignment about the Israel and Palestine conflict. However, the student was given full credit for sparse responses, such as, "...they broke out in many wars." and "...till this day both countries do not like one another." This limited feedback denies the student the opportunity to be made aware of the steps needed to improve his writing.
- Using the WITsi approach, teachers are regularly tracking the progress of targeted students and making adjustments to meet students' learning needs. A review of tracking sheets revealed some progress for a few students on whom the teachers focused. For example, progress tracking in global, geometry, algebra and English classwork showed that five out of ten monitored students showed evidence of mastery of sentence boundaries. After adjustments to the curricula, the remaining five students achieved mastery and were able to move on to develop two skills, varying sentence types and coordinating conjunctions.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The principal has created opportunities for collaboration and professional development opportunities for staff, a system of ongoing feedback to families, and advisement/guidance supports for students.

Impact

Systems and structures for communication, professional development, and supports foster a culture of high expectations for all members of the school community.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations regarding professionalism, instruction, communication, and other elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to staff through a staff handbook, ongoing weekly memos, and frequent cycles of observation and feedback to teachers. All teachers assess their performance using a needs assessment based on Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and they identify goals and benchmarks. Frequent cycles of observation provide ongoing feedback to teachers regarding progress towards professional goals.
- The faculty is engaged in ongoing professional development and collaboration in which teachers assume accountability for meeting established expectations for professional growth. For example, teachers develop individual professional goals aligned to the school's instructional goals of building reading comprehension and citing textual evidence, and they self-select professional development resources, such as Data Decisions to Improve Results and Concept-Based Curriculum for Deeper Understanding, from the online professional development library, PD 360.
- School leaders and staff communicate to families the expectations for college and career readiness through ongoing workshops designed to help them understand what is necessary for their students to graduate from high school and be ready for college. For example, a presentation facilitated by a New Visions specialist utilized individualized color-coded college readiness trackers that displayed data from the Skedula online grading program to illustrate progress towards graduation and college. This presentation was facilitated three times, to teachers and staff, families, and students and differentiated to meet the needs of each of these constituencies. The PupilPath online grade reporting program provides parents and students with on-demand access to live data regarding student attendance and performance. Parents shared that they appreciate the access to PupilPath, the frequent communication from teachers, and the principal's weekly positive communications celebrating student progress.
- The school has implemented an advisory program, using the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum, where teachers facilitate weekly grade-specific lessons to groups of students. In addition, all teachers act as mentors to a group of students, and these groups remain intact throughout the students' years in high school as mentors loop with their mentee groups. Mentors meet with their mentee groups 12 times during the year to review progress reports and report cards and to facilitate reflection and goal setting to support student preparation for the next level. Students shared that these supports help them understand the school's expectations and their individual progress towards meeting those expectations.

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

Teacher teams analyze student work and diagnostic and interim assessment data as they develop appropriate goals to meet the needs of students. Distributed leadership structures are in place so teachers have a voice in key decisions.

Impact

Current team structures promote shared leadership and are aiding in improving student learning and teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders ensure that teachers engage in ongoing professional collaborations in the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards that are aligned to the school's goals. For example, during the team meeting observed, English and special education teachers carefully reviewed student achievement data and discussed next steps. Analysis of assessment data showed that students needed additional scaffolds to support the development of summarizing skills and revealed a need for increased opportunities for evidence-based writing across all content areas. As a result, the teachers developed a notecard strategy to support students with summarizing and designed a checklist rubric to guide students in assessing their work. Teachers reported that the new structures have resulted in increased student achievement. These achievements are documented in the gains displayed in periodic assessments and the increased number of students that have achieved mastery of targeted WITsi skills.
- During team meetings, teachers share best practices, analyze benchmark data, review student work, and revise curricula. Teachers develop appropriate strategies to support learners and adjust curricula. During the teacher team meeting visited, teachers shared that they have learned how to "take diagnostic data and turn it into action steps" to improve student learning using this structure as a medium. For example, the agenda for the teacher team meeting was to "determine next steps on instruction for ELA Regents prep students." Teachers discussed data from the writing strategy tracking sheet and determined that they will group students based on the results to develop targeted strategies for the identified groups. In response to the data, some teachers have increased the number of revisions required for each assignment, while another teacher noted that her students must read their written drafts aloud to support them in self-editing and assessing. As a result of these aforementioned practices, there has been an increase in proficiency on interim assessments and students' performance based assessment tasks completion rates have improved. For example, monitored students showed movement towards mastery including one student who displayed mastery in three out of three skill sets in global, math and English content areas.
- School leaders empower teachers to make decisions that impact student learning across the school. During the team meeting, teachers divulged their request for a Saturday school program to support students with improving their literacy skills in preparation for the English Regents exam. This request was based on data reviews from teacher teamwork. The administration agreed to allocate funds to support the initiative which resulted in increased student mastery. Data revealed that the most consistent gains in periodic assessment scores were received by students who regularly attended Saturday school.