Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Fort Greene Preparatory Academy

Middle School 691

100 Clermont Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11205

Principal: Paula Lettiere

Date of review: January 22, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Lucia Perez-Medina
The School Context

Fort Greene Preparatory Academy is a middle school with 241 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 71% Black, 24% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.1%.

School Quality Criteria

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<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<td>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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
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<tr>
<td>3.4  Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
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<td>4.2  Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Proficient |

**Findings**
The school conveys high expectations that promote a culture of mutual accountability, encourages parental involvement, and fosters learning that prepares students for college and career.

**Impact**
Staff and students are well supported in order to meet school expectations, and parents understand the expectations established for their children.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school communicates with parents about learning expectations through family newsletters, notices, ongoing parent conferences, Jupiter Grades, and progress reports. Workshops and partnerships provided to families include Family Science Day through a partnership with Urban Advantage. Additionally, parents participate in academic and personal learning experiences by attending honor roll ceremonies and special events.

- The school-wide portfolio-based grading system provides the opportunity for students to engage parents in student-led conferences. This system was implemented to instill greater ownership of students for their work. Students work weekly in advisory class to reflect on where they are in their practice, with an emphasis on the quality of work as aligned to the standards. Students reflect on their academic progress towards expectations using each quarter’s progress report and their own work products.

- A staff handbook communicates high expectations for professionalism, instruction, and communication, for all staff. The principal communicates with the staff via a weekly newsletter informing them of expectations, professional learning touchstones, recognitions, and other announcements. In addition, various memoranda, data collection and reporting sheets, and templates for analyzing student work, further specify the school’s high expectations. For example, instructional memoranda explicitly state expectations linked to the targeted components of the Danielson Framework and the instructional focus across the school.

- During the parent meeting, some parents praised the school for high expectations and added that they are kept abreast of their children’s progress toward those expectations, via phone calls and emails from most teachers, one-to-one conferences during Open School Week, the weekly parent outreach period, and via recognition ceremonies that celebrate students’ accomplishments. Three parents expressed that they can keep track of their children’s performance regularly by logging into Jupiter Grades. In addition, parents enjoyed the opportunity to meet with their child and his/her advisor to discuss goals, portfolio work, strengths, and growth areas, and learn about the best ways to support their children’s learning.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Developing |

Findings
Although the school’s curricula is rigorous and coherent, the school has not yet fully embedded multiple entry points so that lessons fully challenge students and engage all students in high levels of thinking and discussion.

Impact
Lessons do not consistently challenge all students, particularly high performers, to their full potential, thus limiting opportunities for them to engage in higher order thinking tasks and discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- In some of the classrooms visited, students had opportunities to engage in partnership discussions. However, across classrooms, there were uneven levels of student thinking and participation. During a history lesson, the teacher asked students to discuss how media and entertainment affected American society in the 1920’s. Some students did not participate or respond to their partner. One group completed the task, with five students sitting quietly waiting for the teacher without an extension activity available, while another group had difficulty completing the task without access to supports such as partnership talk, sentence starters, or other scaffolds to support their understanding of the task and accelerate their learning.

- During a math lesson in an Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) class, all students were expected to multiply fractions and apply properties of operations to generate equivalent expressions. All students completed the same pages in a workbook. The students were not given the opportunity to engage in a discussion with their partners or within their groups. In addition, although there were calculators available for the students to solve the problems, there were groups of students, particularly the students with disabilities, struggling with the task and there were no additional strategies or supports like manipulatives or models to support their learning.

- In three out of seven classes visited, lessons included low-level questions and limited student engagement. For example, in one eighth-grade math class, the teacher asked Depth of Knowledge level one questions and solved basic math problems on the board while students passively observed with no hands-on manipulative experiences and/or opportunities for student-to-student conversations. Additionally, in one science class, the teacher-directed lesson on Understanding Symbiosis provided limited opportunities for student discussions.

- In three classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions and students had access to discussion prompts. In one lesson students had to evaluate evidence on a research article for their persuasive essay and students had the opportunity to discuss their positions with the peers. However, in four classrooms visited, there were no opportunities for peer-to-peer discussions and supports available for students to articulate their learning to their partners.
Findings
School leaders and teachers selected curricula that are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and accentuate the instructional shifts. Furthermore, curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and assessment results.

Impact
The school’s curricular decisions across grades and subjects exposure students to curricula that promote college and career readiness. Additionally, amended units of study include tasks that allow all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Expeditionary Learning for English language arts and Pearson’s Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3) for math are utilized and aligned to the CCLS. Other content areas use New York State (NYS) scope and sequence to provide a framework to enhance units of study so they are demanding and rigorous. Science teachers are also using the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), FOSS, trade books, and videos, to incorporate science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) standards in an integrated approach.

- Most lesson plans reviewed used the Lesson Assessment Framework allowing teachers to align their planning structure to the foundational practice of the Lesson Assessment Framework “I do (model), “We do” (guided practice), “You Do It Together” (group discussion for independent practice) and “You Do” (independent practice). This gradual release of responsibility model provides for a greater level of student engagement, and, specifically for English language learners and students with disabilities, an increase in their work products that were either not attempted or far below standards, to work that approaches or meets standards.

- Teachers use unit planning to support portfolio development. Each department (ELA, math, history, and science) aligns their unit planning to the portfolio expectations. Units are designed to build skills that will be applied to a culminating task, a Portfolio Performance Task that demonstrates student proficiency and that populate each student’s portfolio.

- Lessons and academic tasks include the integration of the instructional shifts across subject areas. For example, a sixth grade English language arts task asked students to conduct a close reading activity to analyze quotes from Steve Jobs’ speech and identify a claim and provide text based details that support the claim.
Findings
The school has aligned its use of common assessments and grading policies to provide feedback to staff, and students. Teachers utilize the data to determine progress towards school goals.

Impact
Feedback to students and teachers based on assessments and grading is strategically used to enable the school to be more precise in measuring student progress in order to adjust curricula and teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- Portfolio Performance Tasks take students through a problem solving cycle that requires the transference of skills acquired over the course of a unit toward a new situation. Student portfolios are assessed each marking period and teachers are provided feedback from the administration on how to further improve student mastery.

- The school uses a wide range of data to track student progress. These include Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) performance assessments in math, science, English language arts, and history, CCLS benchmark assessments in ELA and math, entry and exit tickets for daily lessons, in class exit projects with accompanying rubrics and checklists. Teachers use benchmark data to determine student groupings and differentiation needs. Based on the data, teachers design targeted instructions to support areas of need.

- The school has implemented Student-Led Conferences to foster student ownership in their work and empower students to actively monitor and improve their own work. Using the Portfolio Performance Tasks students reflect on their work and set goals for improvement.

- The school collaboratively scores Common Core performance tasks in English Language Arts (ELA) and math three times per year. This data is used to identify grade level strengths and weaknesses, to determine learning gaps across the school, and to target additional supports and resources to students and classrooms where students are performing in the bottom one third.

- The school uses Jupiter Grades, an online grading system where teachers regularly upload students' formative and summative data and other relevant information like student profiles. This data is tracked regularly by administrators and teachers to monitor student progress. In addition, parents have access to review their children’s performance across the year across all subject areas for every marking period.
**Quality Indicator:** 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development  
**Rating:** Proficient

**Findings**  
Teacher teams promote the school goals through ongoing collaborations using school data. Analysis of school data and work products occurs regularly and focuses on the improvement of student outcomes.

**Impact**  
School-wide team structures and decisions demonstrate an increase in teacher capacity and student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers meet in both content teams and grade teams. Weekly grade teams employ action planning to determine steps necessary to improve consistency and coherent instruction across classrooms in a grade. Problem solving protocols are employed to address improving academic behaviors and student performance. Sixth grade is currently working on increasing and improving group work protocols and assessments. Seventh grade is working on improving in-class transitions, and eighth grade is working on supporting students in being able to articulate what they are learning and why.

- Grade teams and content teams have leaders that confer with the administration weekly regarding agendas and initiatives to ensure alignment of instruction and student progress. Content teams look at student work protocols, and review portfolios to see patterns of strength and weakness and tasks, lessons, or units, that need adjustments to ensure success of students. As a result of this work, portfolio tasks have become more authentic and meaningful and student work completion has increased and at a higher quality.

- Two team leaders are part of an eight-week network affinity-training group, which builds capacity in teacher leaders to set agendas and action items and lead groups of teachers to produce concrete outcomes. Two team leaders have been identified as model teachers as part of the winter cohort. They are being coached through the Learning Partners program to build their capacity in coaching their peers. The Learning Partners team has been working as a collaborative group to identify foundational practices that create consistency across grades and the school and identify gaps in practice among current teams. The findings of their work are driving the action plans of the other teams.

- While observing a teacher team, members used a *Looking at Student Work* protocol to review a group of students' performance on a task where students had to analyze a chapter in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and write an analytical response. The team analyzed the results and focused on the extended constructive response. Targeted students were discussed and strategies including the use of different modes of expression and presentation were shared practices that the participants agreed to implement before the next meeting.