Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Gramercy Arts
High School M374
40 Irving Place
Manhattan
NY 10003

Principal: Susan DiCicco

Date of review: May 6, 2015
Reviewer: Vivian Orlen
The School Context

Gramercy Arts is a high school with 513 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 43% Black, 44% Hispanic, 5% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 29% of the students enrolled and girls account for 71%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86.8%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<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>
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<tr>
<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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<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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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<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>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<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>
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**Area of Celebration**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</thead>
</table>

**Findings**
Teacher teams consistently analyze data and student work for students they share. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

**Impact**
Professional inquiry based collaborations strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers and result in progress toward goals for groups of students. Distributed leadership structures ensure that teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**
- Teacher teams have worked on the school goal of increasing alignment towards the Instructional Shift of citing evidence in discussion. To this end, teachers created a Common Core aligned writing rubric, focused on argument along with a student-to-student interaction rubric to promote Accountable Talk. The school will be using these rubrics across all grades and subjects.

- Teaching Matters trained content lead teachers looking at student work protocols to facilitate their weekly team meetings to use in teacher plans. These leaders meet weekly with the principal for further coaching. There was feedback from these leaders that teachers wanted to devote more time to this work, so an additional day of common planning per week was added in response.

- In a social studies content team meeting teachers shared that they have been conducting item analysis of Regents exams. They learned that thematic and DBQ essays need to be an instructional priority and consequently they have begun to reshape unit plans and rubrics incorporating skills such as citing text based evidence, synthesis of evidence from multiple sources, and annotating text. In a different teacher meeting, science teachers indicated they are engaged in the same process have already strengthened teacher capacity by identifying and working on teaching strategies to help students writing in nonfiction include graphs and learn to read and use chart across science courses.

- Teacher team leaders shared that they have begun to use Google Docs in order to collaborate more efficiently by sharing agendas, minutes, feedback and structured protocols that worked well. This process has built leadership capacity and shared decision making through the sharing of resources in addition to the weekly meeting with the principal. One team leader was able to revise and post analyzing student work protocols that were used by another department leader.
**Area of Focus**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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**Findings**
School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Curricula do not provide a consistent level of rigor across all grades and content areas and for all of the school's diverse learners.

**Impact**
Curricular inconsistencies in alignment to both the CCLS and the instructional shifts and academic tasks do not consistently emphasize high-order thinking skills across subject for most learners, including English Language learners and students with disabilities.

**Supporting Evidence**
- Conversations with the school leadership, as well as, a review of curriculum documents reveal that the school is still in the process of aligning curricula in all subject areas to Common and Core Learning Standards and/or content standards. For example, while math curricula demonstrated standards connected to multi-step problem solving, there was limited planning regarding constructing mathematical arguments and math modeling. While the social studies curricula incorporated Common Core standards for literacy, these were unevenly embedded in the living environment curriculum.

- In reviewing curricula it was revealed that academic tasks had limited coherence across grades and subject areas. Additionally, there was limited evidence that the assigned tasks developed rigorous habits to consistently push students to higher-order thinking.

- A review of student work products and accompanying end of unit tasks examined by teachers inconsistently demonstrate high levels of rigor or alignment to Common Core Learning Standards.
Additional Findings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
Teacher practice across classrooms reflects an articulated set of beliefs regarding how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Across classrooms, work products and discussion strategies provide students with opportunities to engage with peers in high-level discourse.

Impact
Coherence in teacher practice ensures a consistent learning experience for all students. Student work products and class discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence
- The school belief that students learn best when engaged in collaborative group conversation, was seen in the majority of classrooms visited. For example, in an English language arts class students were using multiple texts to discuss Freudian ego theory in analyzing the main characters in Lord of Flies.

- In a 10th grade English class students were engaged in Socratic Seminar as a springboard for a writing an essay. Students were discussing The Pillowman, by Martin McDonagh and comparing it with a critical essay “the Themes of the Pillowman,” by Martha Lavey. In this seminar students made connections in the texts that they would later develop in an essay.

- Classrooms reflected the school focus of increasing the quality of on demand writing by asking students to engage in on demand writing tasks that require students to interpret data such as charts and graphs or analyze information. For example, in a social studies class, students used graphs and charts to create written responses analyzing the effect of the Columbian Exchange for both Europe and the Americas. In a Geometry class, students were writing an analysis of a Transformation Project that required students to compare and contrast plane coordinates and use spatial reasoning to analyze effects in relationships, and make real work connections.
Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact
A system of using assessments to provide teachers and students with actionable feedback promotes an understanding of student progress towards goals. Varied checks for understanding lead to effective instructional adjustments to meet student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has used feedback from its common assessments such as from midterms, final examinations, and Regents exam data to adjust curriculum. For example, the assessment feedback revealed that students needed to improve writing skills across content areas. As a result, the school has decided to include more on demand writing tasks across all core subjects.

- The school has designed Common Core aligned rubrics and has begun to use them across grade. For example one of the rubrics created is a grade 9 and 10 Common Core aligned writing rubric, focused on argument. The school has also piloted a class debate rubric designed to encourage greater student-to-student interaction and promote Accountable Talk.

- Across the majority of classrooms, teachers use peer and self-assessment practices. In a ninth grade science class students working in groups graded each other's work before sharing it with the entire class using a rubric. However, in some classrooms visited, although students worked together on some of the problems, they did not peer or self-assess their work or other students work. This resulted in some students not being able to articulate what they were working on and why it was important. Other students, when stuck, were not able to complete the task without the help of the teacher.
Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations (professionalism, instruction, communication, and other elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching) to the entire staff and are developing training and a system of accountability for those expectations. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students and are beginning to create effective feedback and guidance/advisement supports for students.

Impact
Systems of training and accountability are beginning to support faculty and staff in meeting professional expectations. Structures of targeted support for students are developing the effective level of detail and clarity needed to ensure that students are prepared for college and career.

Supporting Evidence
- The Staff Handbook communicates clear expectations for staff in regards to professionalism and instruction. For example, the expectations for classroom management are incorporated and are connected to the school wide training for a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) in February and launched school wide spring semester.

- The online gradebook Skedula was introduced this year to provide students and families with real time feedback on academic progress. While trainings have increased teacher participation in the program, the school is still moving towards 100% participation. While students in the International Baccalaureate classes reported that they feel challenged and that teachers have high expectations, students in non-International Baccalaureate classes frequently reported that teachers do not communicate confidence that the students can achieve and they are not asked to work hard. The principal is in the process of expansion of AP classes that will be available to a greater cross section of students in fall 2015.

- The principal met with all teachers individually to develop professional goals based on previous observation data. The principal, in collaboration with other school leaders, has begun to develop a professional development plan for 2015-2016 to address individual and common pedagogical priority areas based on the Danielson Framework.