Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Lou Gehrig Academy

Middle School X151

250 East 156 Street
Bronx
NY 10451

Principal: Socorro Rivera

Date of review: March 13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart
Lou Gehrig Academy is a middle school with 253 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 27% Black, 71% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 35% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89.5%.

### School Quality Criteria

#### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<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>
</tr>
<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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
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#### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
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#### Systems for Improvement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<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>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings
The school uses common summative assessments and a wide variety of ongoing formative assessments and checks for understanding to obtain a clear picture of student progress across grades and content areas and makes effective adjustments to curricula.

Impact
All students, including students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), demonstrate increasing mastery and understand what their next learning steps involve.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers use the results of assessments of student progress in all grades and content areas to adjust curricula and instruction. The school measures the Fountas and Pinell reading levels for all students three times a year and shares this information with the teachers of each student. Teachers use this information to group students for instruction and provide them with targeted texts. English language arts (ELA) teachers conference with individual students about their reading levels, the texts that they should be reading currently and those they should be striving to read to meet their goals. Content area teachers receive the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) scores for all ELLs so they are aware of the language skill levels and use the information to plan differentiated instruction. The percentage of grade 6 students scoring at Level 2, 3 or 4 on the New York State ELA exam increased from 29% in 2013 to 44% in 2014. In 2013, only 6% of ELLs in grade 6 scored at Levels 2, 3, or 4. In grade 7 the next year, 15% of ELLs scored above a Level 1.

- Teachers’ assessment practices across grades and content areas regularly include tracking student progress using a variety of grade-wide baseline and benchmark assessments that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, they use teacher created unit tests and projects to have ongoing information about how students are progressing. Teachers in many classes took notes on how individual students performed during group or individual work. Students worked in groups formed based on prior assessment results and teachers included grouping for instruction in their lesson plans.

- One student explained that they often work together on projects and that doing so helps them incorporate the suggestions from their peers into their writing. Students use task-specific rubrics to self-assess as they complete work products. These rubrics state clearly what is expected of the student and often note the circumstances under which the work is to be produced, such as whether it should be done alone, on demand, timed, or with a partner so that students are well aware of their next steps. In one class, students used a peer assessment checklist to make suggestions for improvement, including “A Penny for Your Thoughts,” to their fellow group members who presented in a fish bowl activity.
Area of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<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
Many teachers participate in structured inquiry-based collaborations promoting the achievement of school goals and they analyze assessment data and student work to deepen the implementation of the Common Core.

Impact
Although the improvement in pedagogical practices of teachers is strengthened with a focus on improving outcomes for all students, the practices have not yet resulted in school-wide instructional coherence.

Supporting Evidence
- While all teachers participate in grade and vertical team meetings, teachers report that they are not all formally programmed and that some teams meet informally during lunch hours, which limits the coherence of inquiry-based teacher team practices across the school. During weekly team meetings, teachers focus on developing rigorous tasks to incorporate into lesson plans by identifying trends from student work, such as exit slips, and analyzing data prepared by the data specialist and shared online. Teachers discuss the progress of students they share across the grade. Teachers stated that they focus on tailoring instruction based on the results of unit pre-assessments. The grade 7 team is focusing on increasing vocabulary skills.

- The school has a large ELL population (35%) and has set a Comprehensive Educational Plan goal to improve the performance of this subgroup. The school formed a collaborative teacher team to focus on language development and vocabulary for ELLs. This team discussed the progress of targeted students with respect to academic language acquisition. The team had targeted students for support to move them from the Advanced to Proficient levels on the NYSESLAT. They collected data on student performance from examples of student work and listened to recordings of the students speaking to determine how well the students demonstrate phonemic awareness. The team used an established protocol that included an agenda, a graphic organizer for collecting data, guiding questions such as, “What modifications [to the task], if any, might be necessary?” and plans for the next meeting.

- In addition to the vertical and grade teacher teams, teachers participate in other teams such as the School Implementation Team and the Professional Development Team, which determines the agenda for future professional development by analyzing trends in student and teacher performance. The data specialist meets with teams and with individual teachers to share results of assessments and aggregated data on student and school performance.
**Additional Findings**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**
Curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous skills and are planned and revised based on analysis of student work.

**Impact**
All students, including students with disabilities and ELLs, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

**Supporting Evidence**
- Teachers plan for scaffolded instruction for students with disabilities and ELLs using information about their skill levels. For example, teachers create graphic organizers so that students can take notes, draw pictures or graphs, and explain their thinking. Some teachers plan for students to write their explanations in their native language. For example, teachers create graphic organizers so that students can take notes, draw pictures or graphs, and explain their thinking. Some teachers plan for students to write their explanations in their native language. In one lesson plan, the teacher modified the text so that students across the range of reading levels in the class could access the material and prepare for an upcoming fish bowl discussion. One version of the text was an online New York Times article and the other version was a synopsis of the same article for use by a group of students identified for this type of support through prior assessment of their reading level.

- School leaders and teachers focus on incorporating critical thinking skills into all lessons and specifically plan for students to cite evidence from the texts. School leaders provide weekly professional development on developing rigorous tasks and teachers work in teams every week to plan tasks for unit and lesson plans.

- The principal randomly reviews lesson plans focusing on what students are supposed to learn to ensure they include a consistent emphasis on opportunities for high-level student discussions, hands on activities in science, and rigorous problem solving in math. A math lesson plan on the topic of solving linear equations identified specific groups of students with matching tasks. The lesson plan also identified questions to prompt student discussion, such as, “What do [these two equations] have in common?” and anticipated misconceptions.
Findings
Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points for all students to access the curricula and produce meaningful student work.

Impact
Students are engaged in challenging tasks that reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers in most classes tailor instruction to individuals or groups of students. In one class, the teacher had task cards with problems of different levels of difficulty prepared for identified students. One group solved a linear equation by having members of the group take turns to add the next step in the process. The students questioned and challenged each other to defend their work. One student asked another to “prove that seven is the correct answer.” The teacher circulated throughout the room, intervening where needed and keeping students focused on the task.

- Students engaged in a fish bowl activity discussing the fashion of wearing “sagging pants” and the trend to make such fashions illegal in some communities. Some students participated in the discussion while others took notes on how many times they heard conversation prompts and what suggestions they would give to the participants to make their conversation better. Some students coached the participants, reminding them of discussion points. The students facilitated the activity with the teacher only occasionally intervening to remind students to make an explicit claim. In another class, the students engaged in a lively discussion about what they would do if they ruled the world. Some suggestions included having restaurants serve “good, healthy food” or “I would give back to the people in my country. I would enjoy it!”

- In many classes, students engaged in lively exchanges with one another. In a health class, a student stated that he thought his parents told him that eating carrots was good for his eyes just to make him eat carrots. The teacher replied that he should do a research project on the benefits of eating carrots. A few classes, however, were teacher centered and the dominant discussion mode was questioning by the teacher with one student response followed by another teacher posed question. Students stated that the work they do is challenging, in part because they challenge each other to do better.

- Student work posted in the halls reflects writing in all content areas. Examples included students in a physical education class wrote informational essays about a trip they had taken and the guidance department had students write essays about “what they see when they look in the mirror.”
**Quality Indicator:** 3.4 High Expectations  
**Rating:** Well Developed

**Findings**
School leaders make clear their expectations for professionalism and high student achievement and successfully partner with families to support student progress leading to college and career readiness and provide training to reinforce those expectations.

**Impact**
School staff and families have a strong partnership and hold each other accountable for helping students meet high expectations.

**Supporting Evidence**
- Students set goals each marking period and review these goals during individual conferences with their teachers. Every week the assistant principals hold a “Morning Mix” with the entire grade to discuss how well the students are doing with respect to academic performance and attendance, which at the current rate of 92.5% has improved three percentage points from last year. Teachers keep conferencing logs to track student progress. Students stated that they know what is expected of them because they review their goals during these conferences and because the teachers outline clearly what is expected for each assignment. They further noted that they understand the connection between what they are expected to do in school now and becoming prepared for college.

- Parents stated they understood that the school had high expectations for their children in order to prepare them for the next level, whether it was the next grade or high school. The principal posts a monthly letter to parents and a calendar on the school website, as well as mailing it home. A parent said that the school is “leading her child where she wants to go” and that “All of the demands for her future are being met.” Another stated that the school is “instilling in [her son], the qualities he needs” to reach his dream of becoming a lawyer. Parents further agreed that it is their job to partner with the school to make sure their children do what is expected of them. The parent coordinator offers workshops to parents on understanding the expectations of the Common Core, as well as how to work with the teachers on preparing children for the ELA and math exams.

- The principal communicates with the teachers and staff through a daily bulletin, which reminds and encourages teachers to continue to strive to meet expectations. There is a faculty handbook and a website with resources for students, teachers and parents to use to help their children. The school leaders provide professional development on instructional expectations based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching and continually provide feedback to teachers through their observation process.

- The school uses Engrade, an online learning management system, to provide ongoing information to parents about their child’s progress, such as the online grade book. Teachers also keep logs of their communications with parents and use Engrade to record daily information about students’ behavior and how they are helping the students to improve. For example, one teacher records daily notes on students’ behavior and performance that form the basis for conversations with parents. In one exchange between a parent and a teacher, the parent and teacher noted the steps they would take to help the student complete his assignments.