Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Brooklyn Secondary School for Collaborative Studies

Middle - High School K448

610 Henry Street
Brooklyn
NY 11231

Principal: Priscilla Chan

Date of review: January 13, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman
The Brooklyn Secondary School for Collaborative Studies is a middle - high school with 677 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 40% Black, 46% Hispanic, and 10% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 33% students with disabilities. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 93.8%.

### 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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<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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Well Developed</td>
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#### School Culture

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<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>
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#### Systems for Improvement

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<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
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<th>Rating:</th>
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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>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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Area of Celebration

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
All curricula are strategically aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and illustrate integration of the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are coherently embedded across all grades and subject areas.

Impact
All students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs), have ample access to curricula designed to promote college and career readiness. Academic tasks are planned to provide multiple opportunities for all students to demonstrate high levels of thinking.

Supporting Evidence
- All teachers design or adjust curricula and tasks to align to the Expeditionary Learning Core Practices and the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers map out the learning targets and skills students need to master as they engage in gathering, analyzing, and citing evidence to support a claim. In seventh grade United States history, students research patterns in America’s violent history, beginning with the Anglo-Powhatan wars, to consider “how our history has shaped gun culture.” Students apply what they learned in position papers to articulate the government’s role in regulating weapons. Upper grade students study a selection of non-fiction and fiction texts to determine signposts or patterns in literature, and craft short stories in which characters “find solidarity with each other.”

- The math “badge system” requires all students to master Common Core aligned content and skills such as number, quantity, and functions. They move from basic to advanced, to qualify for the mastery passage panel. To earn the advanced level in Algebra, for example, students must “understand the relationships between zeros and factors of polynomials,” “rewrite rational expressions,” and “represent and solve equations and inequalities graphically.” Students identify their strategy, create a plan for implementation, process their learning, and reflect on how “big mathematical ideas” connect to the real world.

- The school-wide criteria for “High Quality Writing” provide all students with exposure to exemplars, and rubrics to make task expectations transparent and for self-reflection. These criteria emphasize multiple perspectives, accuracy, and transferring understanding to new contexts. Additionally, students have multiple opportunities to revise their essays to “mirror the work of professionals.” Given the criteria, all students, particularly English Language Learners and students with disabilities, are supported in developing their writing and thinking. Students shared that this prepares them for college and career because it “engages them in the real world.” One student noted, “We write a lot, and the Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBATs) sometimes require twenty-page essays that have to be aligned to the rubric.”

- For a climate change project, students select research topics, gather, and explore data sources, brainstorm potential variables and testable questions, formulate hypotheses, and conduct experiments. The culminating research paper includes analysis of the student’s approach to studying data, and the application of their analysis to an experimental design. Throughout the process, students reflect, rethink, and revise their work.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy  
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms teaching strategies provide all students with multiple entry points into content and tasks. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking.

Impact
Teaching practices provide access to all learners so that they can demonstrate higher-order thinking. However, the infrequency of student-centered discussions, results in fewer instances for all students to own their learning.

Supporting Evidence
- Students are provided access to challenging content and tasks. For example, ELA students practiced annotation in text excerpts from Fahrenheit 451 and Last Book in the Universe. They recorded text-based questions and determined the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Teachers worked with small groups of students, consistently referring them back to the text, and offered guiding questions to assist students in making inferences. In preparation for a case study to research whether eminent domain developed or destroyed communities, sixth grade students practiced “chunking” text to meet their learning target. One student shared, “I can notice important details in a non-fiction article, and I can analyze what each section is teaching me.

- Algebra students were introduced to an online resource that would support them in addressing missed learning targets. The teacher modeled its use and emphasized that if their answer were wrong, they would get feedback and the opportunity to try again. Color coding emphasized skills each student needed to work on to achieve mastery, and the principal added that students who show a lot of red and yellow are targeted for small group instruction.

- Students with disabilities receive targeted instruction in both their content area class and an additional period during the school day. For example, when a student was struggling to complete his first draft in his government class, or when additional text resources were needed for a Malcolm X study, students received support in both classes. In an eighth grade class, teachers differentiated writing supports: students at a basic level received an outline, mid-level students looked at sample paragraphs to build skill in integrating evidence in writing, and the highest level students were given transitional phrases to strengthen their academic language. Additionally, teachers align students’ learning targets to their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The principal noted that the school’s focus on differentiation this year has resulted in more purposeful student grouping. Additionally, the school’s college and career metrics exceed City percentages in closing the achievement gap for English Language Learners and students with disabilities, and, the principal noted, students with disabilities consistently graduate with Regents diplomas.

- In a twelfth grade ELA class, students offered text-based responses about symbolic interaction theory with the teacher encouraging students to call on each other to agree or disagree. In an Environmental Science class, students worked collaboratively to discern claim and evidence in a text. However, in most classrooms, while teachers provided opportunities for students to engage in discussion, the teacher led most, and there were fewer instances where students engaged with or challenged each other’s thinking.
### Additional Findings

#### Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment | Rating: Well Developed

**Findings**

Across classrooms teachers use assessments, rubrics, and a uniform grading policy aligned to the school’s curricula, to offer a clear picture of student mastery. Common assessment practices create transparency in students’ progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

**Impact**

As a result of the school’s in-depth assessment practices, students and teachers are provided with actionable feedback connected to achievement. Teachers adjust curricula based on multiple data sources.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Criteria for all assessments, written work, case studies, and ongoing PBAT preparation, are explicit in rubrics and a variety of checklists for student self-assessment. The yearlong work to ready students for their end-of-year PBATs provides multiple opportunities to track student progress across grades and subjects. Teachers administer pre- and post-assessments for case study work in order to differentiate for groups of students. Reading groups and selections for students’ independent reading are based on this data. Fluency practice in math helps teachers to recognize trouble spots and track what students missed so that they can make adjustments to lessons. The principal keeps track of student progress and grounds feedback to teachers relative to their students’ progress and performance.

- Learning targets provide students with a clear picture of skills and concepts to be mastered. Actionable feedback aligned to learning targets gives students the needed steps to improve. Progress is captured on the online grading system that teachers update with feedback regularly. One student shared that the learning target reflects “what we will accomplish by the end of the class.” Additionally, teachers’ access to student progress across grades and the use of anecdotal data from student self-assessments support teachers in refining their instruction and curricula. For example, one teacher shared that when he taught a unit on the Brown decision, he realized that there were civil rights terms unfamiliar to his students and provided vocabulary to support their learning. When a sixth grade ELA teacher realized that some of her students needed support with navigating non-fiction text, she immediately set up a small group for targeted intervention.

- This school’s move to mastery-based learning was the impetus for a greater focus on Habits of Work and Learning (HOWLs). The current school policy now requires teachers to assess progress in areas such as “responsibility for my own learning” five times a year. Weekly reflections capture students who assess their progress, such as “I have made great progress toward my goal because I can confidently answer the learning target and use scientific evidence to back it up. My next step is to simply further my skills in what causes and effects natural events like storms.”

- Teachers provide students with feedback and input assessment results into the online grading platform. Students log on and track their own learning, and, as one student shared, “we check our grades on Engrade so we know what goals we need to set.” This extends to students’ Crew period, where students set learning goals and engage in “circles” to discuss progress or challenges. The principal, teachers, and parents agree that this builds stronger academic habits in students across grades, content areas.
Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations  |  Rating: Well Developed

Findings
The school leader consistently communicates high expectations to all staff that is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Families receive ongoing communication that reflects a clear path for their children to college and career.

Impact
All staff are provided with multiple opportunities to meet expectations and to hold themselves accountable. The school and its dedicated families successfully partner to support students in meeting high academic expectations.

Supporting Evidence
- School leaders regularly summarize learning walk data to ensure that all instruction prioritizes student engagement, daily and long-term learning targets, evidence of high-quality work, the school’s Expeditionary Learning Core Values, and HOWLs. November’s summary that noted checks for understanding observed, and instructional practices that lead to high quality work products, reflects the emphasis on embedding HOWLs and Core Values in daily instruction, and ensures school-wide instructional coherence. The school’s “Work Plan” drives team collaborations across all grades and content areas. Teams are responsible for aligning their work to at least one of the goals. The goals center on rigorous PBAT writing tasks, Expeditionary Thursday planning, and using restorative practices to foster positive habits. Observation feedback follows a uniform protocol that invites teachers to discuss progress toward their goals so that all students have access to challenging tasks.

- Parents spoke to the level of communication and support from all teachers and several noted the exemplary attention provided to children with disabilities. The online grading platform provides families with access to their children’s progress, and upcoming projects. One parent offered, “My son wasn’t always engaged, but since coming to this school, his overall history and ELA thinking has become deeper.” Another stated that teachers “instruct me in how to work with my son at home, and how to support him in class. He has grown personally and academically because teachers are in constant contact with me.”

- Two parents shared their initial concern about the rigor in the PBAT process. One was “worried that it was too much work,” but the extensive preparation in reading and writing shifted her thinking. Another shared that she was uncertain about how her son would perform on a Performance Based Assessment (PBAT), but was “blown away” when she saw his final eight-page “college-level research paper” about gentrification, and his presentation to a panel. Another parent offered that the Crew teacher “maintains contact with all of us” and “we are already talking about college which is building my son’s confidence.” Parents agreed that all teachers here “get to know your child individually” and provide a lot more than academic help.”

- The principal’s high expectations foster a positive rapport between teachers and students evident in team discussions and classrooms. Students articulate their next steps toward goals, and this support extends to the Crew class where the expectation is that all “crew mates,” with the support of their teacher, attend college.
Quality Indicator: Quality 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
Teachers systematically analyze their instructional practices and develop strategies to improve student achievement. Distributive Leadership structures facilitate teacher collaboration with school leaders to make critical decisions about teaching and learning across the school.

Impact
Through extensive teamwork, teachers regularly reflect on their practice and play an integral role in key decisions that improve their instructional capacity and student outcomes across the school.

Supporting Evidence
- Grading policy was a collaborative decision derived from the Culture and Character Committee (CCC). The Crew team designed Crew to College curricula and works with the support team to determine academic interventions for tier one, two and three students. The principal makes certain that instructional leaders attend Expeditionary Learning professional development where they learn about effective practices alongside leaders across the City. They then bring their new learning to all school staff during professional development events.

- In a team meeting, teachers focused on one student’s work whose academic progress had been “up and down.” Teachers engaged in a gallery walk of his work ranging from a reading tracker and written work, to a self-assessment, and his writer’s notebook. Through this process, teachers noticed that though the student had difficulty remaining on task, he was a strong writer, and responded well to positive feedback. “It is not language,” one teacher shared, “it is stamina.” The discussion turned to potential next steps to build this student’s persistence, and to instructional implications for their practice. Teachers agreed to assign in-class leadership roles and responsibilities for students, and to adjust how they pace work time to build student persistence in content areas across the grade.

- Teachers shared the value in their professional collaborations. They agree that visiting each other’s classrooms provides a window into how students perform across classes, and supports them in rethinking their instruction. Another offered that it “broadens the landscape of my teaching because when we plan, hearing how others ground the work in the real world is really helpful.” The ELA team is working on vertical alignment across grades so that there are consistent structures in middle and high school classes. They first brainstormed ideas separately, and then the middle and high school teams regrouped to norm how a “jot”, a “write-long”, a “claim”, and a “thesis” are collectively defined to build consistency across grades and content areas.

- The Instructional Leadership and the Culture and Character teams were instrumental in creating the school’s work plan goals and the expectation that all teams align their work to one of them. To ensure that this happens, teacher leaders and school leadership meet weekly. The ELA and the sixth grade teams are focusing their work on the first goal of high quality writing. Grade and department teams also meet weekly to work on PBAT assessments and curricula. Teachers lead as instructional guides, mentors, and team leaders, and feel empowered in their community. Additionally, teachers take part in town halls to “hash out burning questions.” One teacher shared that the transparency of the work “creates a stronger relationship between school leaders and teachers.”