Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences
High school 18K629
5800 Tilden Ave.
Brooklyn
NY 11203

Principal: Sanatha Alexis

Dates of Review:
May 18, 2017 - May 19, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Marion Wilson
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations
Rating: Proficient

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for lesson planning and effective teaching based on the elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that incorporates high expectations for students.

Impact
There is a culture of high expectations to staff accompanied by a system of professional development to support those expectations. Students are provided with ongoing support in meeting expectations and preparing them for their next level in life.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders model and communicate clear expectations to the school’s community via both verbal and written structures that help teachers with the school’s non-negotiable expectations. Expectations for staff conduct, performance, and practice are supported as well through the principal’s open door policy for communication. During a team meeting, teachers commented that the principal makes herself accessible to support teachers daily. In addition, there are systems for professional development that help to support the development of classroom routines that are embodied within the elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Administration provides feedback that is helping teachers improve planning for their diverse learners. The school has a turnkey system to train teachers who were not trained so that they get the information right away. Expectations for lesson planning were introduced to staff using an online platform, and then the principal offered support to help teachers plan more effective interdisciplinary units. Teachers commented on the use of Google documents as a main source for professional development and lesson planning resources.

- The school’s staff have clear systems and structures including articulation that help to make clear the students’ path toward the next level of schooling. School staff have developed a college-going culture at the school. From posters hanging on the wall, classroom doors decorated with banners, and bulletin boards highlighting college acceptance letters, there is a push for students to attend college or transition to the work world. The principal showcased the school’s culinary arts and drama programs, which offered field experiences, as possible career paths for students in the future. Students shared that they participate in individual meetings with their advisors and teachers to review their transcripts and credits toward graduation. Students attend trips to colleges and universities within and out of New York State, which has given them different perspectives about college options, depending on their interests.

- Teachers and other staff have structures for advisory, guidance, and college counseling to help lead students towards making progress in relation to college and career readiness. Most students shared that the school is helpful in preparing them for entering the workforce or going to college. One student shared, “I am able to take classes online to make up credits, because many college programs offer online components so the school is preparing me for my future.” Students shared that their teachers take a vested interest in their futures and share their college experiences with them. They also have opportunities to hear from adults working in fields like corporate America, finance, law, and medicine.
Findings

School staff are beginning to develop a process to review the instructional core in response to student learning needs. There is an informal system in the beginning stages of implementation to evaluate and adjust the effectiveness of the work of teacher teams and professional development sessions.

Impact

School faculty are beginning to regularly evaluate and adjust their work to increase the coherence of policies and practices for the instructional core, use of resources, and effectiveness of teacher team work across the school with particular attention to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS).

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers are developing process to regularly evaluate and adjust assessment and pedagogical practices in response to what is taught and how it is taught across content areas. There are structures in place in some departments that provide challenging work for students which is outlined in the pacing calendar and unit plans. Some teachers follow the school agreed upon guidelines exactly as planned and are only starting to work on revising and adjusting to ensure that they are meeting needed areas of growth for students, as revealed through analysis of tasks and classroom activities. Students are encouraged to write essays in all subject areas according to the school’s instructional expectations. However, there are some classes where this has not yet occurred. While the school has implemented schoolwide strategies to help students write cohesive essays, conduct inquiry, collaborate, and organize their notes while reading (WICOR), this strategy has not yet taken root across most grades and departments. There were missed opportunities for school faculty to ensure that instruction and tasks are modified based on data analysis to support students meeting the expectations of the CCLS.

- The school hired consultants for the math and English departments to support professional development efforts, help teachers unpack the CCLS, and implement the progression of learning standards. This work is only beginning to impact other subject areas. Administration visits with teachers and provides regular and meaningful feedback to help teachers improve their practice in questioning, discussion, and engaging students in learning activities based on their individual needs. The principal works with the inquiry cabinet to develop a system with indicators of success to evaluate their systems for improvement.

- There are informal conversations within the administrative cabinet to try to use findings to communicate examples of strengths, areas of need, and clear next steps for adjustments to the instructional core. Furthermore, a system regularly documents that effective adjustments are being made, including the use of consultants, technology, curricular mapping programs, and teacher team work. The observation process, too, ensures that adult learning supports student progress and mastery. The school has several teams functioning simultaneously, including grade teams for horizontal alignment, content teams for vertical alignment, a pupil personnel team, and a school implementation team. While teams meet regularly, the results of their efforts are not readily communicated across teams to make certain that their work is helping to strengthen instructional coherence across the school. The school is in the process of developing systems and structures to have staff self-reflect on the effectiveness of their teams’ work in relation to the school’s overall goals.
Findings

Curricula maps are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and integrate the instructional shifts for mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) across most grades and subjects. Academic tasks regularly emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills for most students.

Impact

Lesson planning documents reveal purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for most students. Rigor and higher-order thinking are evident across most grades and subjects, with scaffolds for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers design lesson plans aligned to the CCLS and other content area standards. There is a conscious effort to infuse the instructional shifts across most grades and subjects. For example, plans are focused on language acquisition for students across social studies and English. Lesson and unit plans include key elements including essential questions, enduring understandings, and skills requiring students to find, identify, evaluate, and describe. The school introduced a common lesson planning template that is accessible online for all teachers to share and collaborate with each other across grades and departments. This has enabled teachers to incorporate opportunities for small group instruction, student conversations, and assessment for learning, with students grappling with real world problems across most written plans. Lesson plans incorporate various resources and tools to support students’ comprehension. The school’s curricula incorporate elements of a Shakespeare program through the Brooklyn Academy of Music. There is a focus on helping students write essays in content areas. The school uses the City’s scope and sequence for social studies and science to support student understanding of citing evidence and writing from different sources. Additionally, written documents provide students with opportunities to build conceptual understanding and look at questions to determine what is being asked of them. For example, in an ELA lesson plan, students were required to acquire and use general academic and domain specific vocabulary words while integrating and evaluating information in a presentation of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

- Academic tasks allow students to create their own meaning, integrating skills into the process and using what they have learned to solve real world problems. For example, a social studies writing task asked students to craft an argumentative essay about the death penalty using information they would research. Activities appeal to various learning styles such as visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic, as well as different group strategies such as individual, small group, or large group. Teachers make accommodations by using entry points so that learners can explore complex topics through different avenues like using numbers, foundational skill building, and experiential factors. Tasks are aligned to ensure that there is higher-level thinking for ELLs. Curricula documents were designed in response to students’ interests, readiness, and skill levels across most content areas.

- Tasks require students across most subject areas, including ELLs and students with disabilities, to engage in activities which require precision of thought, cooperative learning, taking positions, hands-on learning, and analysis of multiple perspectives. Teachers adapt the instructional strategies in lesson plans based on students’ skills. In some cases, lesson plans call for direct instruction in a skill, modeling, small groups, or other differentiation of the process by which students access material. Included in some plans are different products by which students can show what they have learned.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy

Findings
Teaching strategies are inconsistently executed across subjects and classrooms. There are uneven levels of active student engagement and participation across most classrooms.

Impact
Teaching practices inconsistently engage all learners and do not support students working independently on challenging tasks. There were missed opportunities for student-centered activities across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- While there was some evidence of instructional student groups, they were not always thoughtfully organized or appropriate to build on student strengths. Furthermore, plans for lessons did not provide appropriate pacing and time allocations for students to work productively. For example, in one science class visited, the teacher went through a worksheet without pausing to allow some struggling students an opportunity to complete the worksheet. Some students’ worksheets were left blank because they were not able to keep up the rapid pace. However, in a trigonometry class, students worked in small groups and had sufficient time to move at their own learning paces with the teacher monitoring by walking around the room. While there were time reminders for each activity, students had the option to move on while others could spend more time working through problems.

- Teaching documents and lesson plans represent challenging content knowledge and some understanding of students’ diverse needs, but some lessons did not engage students in high-level cognitive activities. Structures did not always allow for different learning pathways for understanding for ELLs and students with disabilities. In one class, students set the pace of the lesson and the teacher served as a facilitator to support students’ thinking. The teacher encouraged students to use academic vocabulary as well as evidence-based responses. However, this was not seen consistently across most classes visited.

- Teaching strategies and instructional tasks in some classes clearly address the needs of individual students and subgroups, including high performers, but there were missed opportunities across classes visited. For instance, some classes did not make effective use of scaffolding techniques, modeling opportunities, needs-based grouping, activating prior knowledge, or technology to provide multiple entry points into lessons. Furthermore, teachers often asked low level questions and accepted one word or short phrases as responses. Questions did not afford students opportunities to engage in problem-solving, inquiry, or have their voices heard in class discussions. Conversations remained primarily between the teacher and two or three students and were not equitable. Some classes utilized a protocol to encourage student discussions with a partner or in a small group, but in most cases there were whole group, ping-pong types of discussions.

- Almost all classes are provided with a resource ring which contains tools to support students during lessons. The color-coded, laminated rings contain content specific academic vocabulary, accountable talk stems, formulas, strategies, and tips to help students work independently. In a few classes visited, teachers used a variety of Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level three and four questions to challenge students cognitively and promote metacognition. In some cases, students were able to make connections among concepts and arrive at new understandings of complex materials. There were two classes where students formulated their own questions, initiated topics, and ensured that there were equitable contributions to conversations by using accountable talk stems or calling on their classmates. However, teachers often missed opportunities to remind students to utilize this tool and engage in high-level cognitive activities.
Findings

Some teachers use or create rubrics and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school’s curricula. There were missed opportunities for teachers to utilize formative assessment strategies during lessons.

Impact

Verbal and written structures for providing feedback to students and teachers are limited and not always actionable. Teacher practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment to make on the spot adjustments in response to students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Some assessment practices provide limited feedback loops for both teachers and students. There are rubrics used and assessments administered across some content areas. However, the choices deliver a limited range of data to support students’ learning needs. While there are some checklists and rubrics offered to students, they are not always aligned to the CCLS or the instructional shifts. In a few instances, feedback to students on work products was actionable and meaningful to help students with their next immediate learning steps. Students receive varied feedback on quizzes and work products. For example, on a vocabulary exam, students received a percentage score and a happy face. In another case, the feedback to a student was, “Really well done. Good use of vocabulary and images. Enjoyed the cut edges of the pages. Lovely.” In contrast, another teacher wrote feedback based on the rubric criteria, reminding the student to create extended metaphors to better demonstrate the student’s comprehension of the subject matter. Moreover, in many examples presented throughout the visit, if students received a perfect grade or attained mastery on an assignment, there was no feedback given to students at all.

- Students are not always actively involved in collecting information from assessments and providing input for success criteria. Teachers are attempting to monitor student understanding during lessons on a continuous basis, but often they are not memorializing what they observed to make purposeful adjustments to their instructional practices. Teachers ask rapid fire, low-level questions to a handful of students and do not call upon others. Sometimes there are exit slips and do now activities which are utilized, but these are frequently left ungraded and do not lead to flexible groupings. There are missed occasions for teachers to reteach or spiral content based on students’ responses and their current needs. Some teachers have instituted a color-coded system to help check for student understanding during the lesson to stop, adjust, or move forward. However, few teachers had the system in place and were utilizing it on a consistent basis.

- There are limited strategies being effectively utilized across most classes to integrate assessments for frequent checks for understanding, including student self-assessment. During class visits, some formative assessment practices included cold calling, rapid fire questions, and colored-coded sticks for measuring student understanding so teachers could make on the spot adjustments to lessons. However, students do not consistently self- or peer-assess against assessment criteria so that they can monitor their own understanding and be aware of their next learning steps. In a few instances, students raised their hands and waited for the teacher to circulate around the room to check their work before they moved on to their next activity. On the other hand, in some classes, teachers observed students working and actively collected information on checklists to support the needs of most students. Yet these effective practices are not coherent across grades and subjects.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings

Teachers are afforded opportunities to serve as teacher leaders, as mentors, and on hiring committees. Teacher teams consistently analyze data for the students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

Teacher practices are improving in the interventions they provide to help students make progress in both reading and math. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams look at multiple sources of common assessments to help determine if students are making progress. The school uses common mid-term assessments using Mastery Connect to document and analyze data for groups of students and their progress towards goals. Teams also review student work products to help inform instructional decisions they make for lesson and unit plans. Teachers review mock Regents’ results, on-demand writing samples, and quizzes to determine how students are performing. One finding was that students are performing better in the area of annotation, which is helping to improve their comprehension skills. Teachers shared that their focus in team meetings has been to improve how they incorporate the use of Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels three and four to create challenging tasks for a diversity of learners. During one of the question and answer sessions, most teachers shared that their analysis of student work and data is helping to improve the curricula and their teaching practices.

- Teachers can offer examples of how their contributions have played a role in school-level decision-making. Teachers shared the improvements that have taken place at the school recently because of their input. For example, teachers are now able to suggest and oversee additional extra-curricular activities for students, such as culinary arts, theatre, fashion design, and photography classes. Teachers also articulated that they needed additional time to work on Regents’ test prep with students, so they proposed volunteering to stay after school to assist students with test-taking strategies. As a result, more students are attempting to sit for Regents examinations earlier in their secondary education experience.

- Both school and teacher leaders help to mentor new teachers, serve as department chairs, and contribute to new ideas and initiatives implemented at the school. Teachers explained that they have opportunities to share best practices with one another as well as lead professional development sessions. Teachers realized there was a need for additional time to meet in vertical and horizontal teams, and they have played a critical role in creatively revising structures to schedule more time for collaboration. Teachers also provide input on hiring decisions for prospective candidates for teaching positions, helping to organize applicants, create the interview questions, and view the demonstration lessons. During the teacher team meeting, teachers shared that the principal has an open-door policy allowing them to propose new ideas and initiatives seeking her support. For instance, school staff felt that too much emphasis was being placed on students’ wearing uniforms, so they supported the students’ proposal to eliminate wearing them. As a result of this collaborative effort, including the support of administration, teachers are more focused on teaching and learning as opposed to enforcement of uniforms as a disciplinary infraction. Teachers shared that they felt that this major decision has contributed to more students being engaged in class rather than on compliance matters.