Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Vista Academy
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 19K661

350 Linwood St.
Brooklyn
NY 11208

Principal: Dia Bryant

Dates of Review:
February 2, 2017 - February 3, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Michele Ashley
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

Vista Academy serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. 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>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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>Well Developed</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings
School structures including Decision-making Periods, Morning Meeting and Town Halls led by teachers and students ensure that students are known well. The school community strategically aligns professional development and family outreach to support student learning.

Impact
Adherence to the core values and personalized student, teacher, and family supports result in the adoption of positive academic and personal behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Leadership and faculty align student support structures to the school’s core values of safety, persistence, attitude, respect and community (SPARC). Leadership and faculty shared that discipline and social-emotional support are based on these values. Teachers shared that there is no need to post class or school rules in their classrooms because all classes are guided by the five core values. All students attend Decision-making Periods (DMP) once each day. Teachers use the DMP’s to teach and discuss the personal and academic behaviors that align to the core values. During a DMP class visit, students analyzed a video on identity development and engaged in a discussion about the personal connections they each made to the video. During this lesson, students responded to each other’s thoughts and asked clarifying questions to better understand their classmate’s point of view.

- School leadership and faculty personalize supports to encourage high levels of attendance and schoolwide adherence to school protocols. There is a full-time attendance teacher who works closely with teachers, guidance and deans to encourage students to attend school daily. Staff make prompt phone calls, home visits, and wake-up calls. Students who are at risk due to frequent absence or lateness receive wrap-around support from guidance staff. Personalized support and positive reinforcement have led to an average attendance rate of 93 percent for both 2014 - 2015 and 2015 - 2016, as well as a 100 percent student uniform compliance. Students helped to design and select uniform choices and faculty, students and parents wear Vista Academy garb with pride.

- Leadership aligns professional development, family engagement and student learning experiences to support student learning and the adoption of the school’s core values. Leadership provides all staff with a copy of the text How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character, which forms the corner stone of the school’s core values. Teachers also attend outside professional development on meditation training and safety. Parents are invited to attend Parent University workshops on SPARC, understanding English Language Learner programs, high school readiness and health resources. Students are introduced to mindfulness, meditation and decision-making via before, during and after school activities. During a Morning Meeting, students voluntarily engaged in meditation and one student led the meeting sharing a self-authored poem entitled “You are have everything you need to be successful.”
Findings
Across most classrooms, teachers use questioning, visuals and translated materials to provide entry points for students and use a variety of discussion and planning strategies to support student discussions and work products. Although some classrooms have begun to incorporate extension activities and high quality supports, this practice is not yet evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

Impact
High level questioning and opportunities for discussion challenge most students and provide opportunities for them to share their thinking; however, the absence of high quality supports and extensions in some classrooms limits some students’ thinking and hinders opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Across most classrooms visited, teachers used questioning to prompt student thinking and engage them in challenging tasks. In a humanities class the teachers asked students questions to help them clarify and define the definitions of hook, claim, evidence, concede, refute and call to action before students engaged in creating their own graphic organizers and writing their argument pieces. This teacher used student exemplars to provide models of the criteria for success and cold called students holding them accountable for their work and the use of content vocabulary. The level of questioning, clarity and accountability evident in this classroom, although present in most classrooms, was not present in all classrooms visited.

- Teachers use annotation, writing, and discussion strategies to support student comprehension and writing practices. Across classrooms visited, teachers use RAD (restate the questions, answer the question and details included) and ACE (argument, claim, and evidence) to formulate responses to question prompts. Teachers also encourage students to use the terms confirm, challenge or extend in response to their classmates’ claims and to demonstrate their thinking. In some classrooms teachers have also begun to include extension activities to challenge the highest performing students. In a math class, an independent group is required to complete an extension question that asked them to compare mark up and final sale prices while their classmates complete their assigned task. This practice is not yet consistent across the vast majority of classrooms.

- Across classrooms teachers guide students in the production of high-level student work and engage them in discussions. Across classes visited teachers checked in with working groups to prompt their thinking and push them forward in their work. Teachers also encouraged students to respond to classmates’ thoughts and analyze their work. Teachers reminded students to confirm, challenge or extend the responses of their classmates and students were able to appropriately use these discussion stems; however, across most classrooms student responses were prompted by teachers and teacher support was needed to keep the conversations flowing. Students have yet to consistently take ownership of the conversations and respond freely to one another.
Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that learning objectives are aligned to content and Common Core Learning Standards and lesson plans integrate academic vocabulary across grades and content areas. Curricula is planned and revised using student work samples and data from interim assessments.

Impact

Alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and data-informed planning builds coherence and ensures that a diversity of learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, have access to the curriculum and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Across lesson plans reviewed, teachers identify the content and Common Core standards that align to the learning objective of each lesson. Cited standards include descriptions of what students will be able to do and many lessons include examples. One math lesson states that students will use proportional relationships to solve multistep ratio and percent problems and includes real world examples of simple interest, tax mark-ups, gratuities and percent of increase and decrease.

- Across grades and content areas curricula includes key academic and content vocabulary that aligns to lessons and unit plans. Lesson plans include clear “I Can” learning objectives that include the targeted skill and strategy students are expected to learn or practice in each lesson and highlight key vocabulary that aligned to the stated objective. An English Language Arts (ELA) lesson states, “I can identify and describe an author’s argument by using the ACE annotation method.” This lesson highlights the terms, claim, argument, credible textual evidence and ACE method. A science lesson states, “I can compare and differentiate between types of mixtures and pure substances by analyzing examples of matter.” This lesson highlights the terms matter, mixture, homogeneous, heterogeneous, pure substance, element and compound.

- The schoolwide lesson plan template includes a section for plans for differentiation and the identification of learning groups, which requires teachers to provide a rationale for working groups in direct relation to the learning objective. An ELA lesson identifies small groups for targeted instruction and notes that groups are created based on student Lexile levels and their most recent interim assessment scores. This lesson states that one group will engage in an independent reading and discussion activity while a second group will work in a teacher-guided reading group using stop and jot to take notes while the teacher models on a white board.

- A math lesson assigns students to groups based on student performance on the previous day’s exit ticket assessment. Students are placed into one of four groups identified as independent, need some nudging, need some scaffolds, and teacher dependent. Lessons include plans to frontload academic vocabulary and choice in presentation methods and products to support ELLs and students with disabilities. In an ELA lesson students can choose to share by creating a short response, poem, skit, rap or illustration.
Additional Finding

### Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment

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<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

Across grades and content areas teachers use rubrics and assessments aligned to the curricula and provide written feedback and next steps to students. Faculty use interim assessment data to monitor student progress toward grade level goals.

**Impact**

Teachers use feedback from assessments and student work to plan instruction and provide students with actionable next steps to improve their performance.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers use and create rubrics that align to a four-point scale and clearly describe the categories and performance indicators that are assessed in each rubric. Rubrics are genre and project-specific and range across the four points from needs improvement (far below basic, level 1) to outstanding (at grade level, level 4). A narrative writing rubric assesses student performance according to four criteria including focus/exposition, organization/plot, narrative techniques and language. A local advertisement project rubric assesses performance in problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, connections and representation. Teachers highlight student performance levels in each category as well as provide written feedback.

- Teachers across grades and content areas provide written feedback to students that result in student revisions and improvements in performance. Teachers provide students with feedback that aligns to the rubric and identifies strengths and areas for improvement. One teacher added notes to the local advertisement rubric that highlighted the student’s use of rates and unit rates and recommended that the student apply additional strategies learned in class, such as proportions and ratio tables. This teacher also suggested that the student justify his reasoning with explanations. A review of student work and teacher assessment data reveals that students use teacher feedback to revise drafts and resubmit work to improve performance. Portfolios reviewed included criteria for success, which is a teacher or student-created checklist of the expectations for successfully completing an assignment. One work sample included a hand-written student checklist that stated “Re-read performance task and revise, fix errors, print out again and resubmit.”

- Faculty administer interim assessments four times a year and use interim assessment data to plan and revise curricula after each cycle. Teachers review student performance data to identify trends across the grades within each content area and identify priority standards by grade. At the time of the Quality Review, faculty had analyzed student performance on interim assessment two and selected priority standards for math, ELA, and humanities and set target goals for student performance. After each interim assessment, teachers and students participate in Re-engagement Week. During this week, each scholar receives a copy of his or her assessment performance. Students meet with teachers to reflect and plan for improvement.

- Teachers create action plans for target students that will engage students in new practices and add new instruction to do nows, mini-lessons, small group instruction. Action plans reviewed include plans for new strategies to address target standards, and plans to embed standards into homework, do now, mini-lessons and quizzes. One plan to improve citing of informational text evidence to support claims includes plans for students to break down text into paragraphs to identify how each paragraph supports the main idea of the text.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
School leaders provide training and consistently communicate next steps for all staff via faculty conference notes, newsletter and observation feedback. Teacher teams and staff systematically communicate a unified set of values and high expectations for all students.

Impact
School leaders and staff hold themselves accountable to articulated core values and schoolwide expectations and provide clear feedback and effective guidance so that students are prepared for the next level of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and learning. Professional development begins in the summer with faculty training that outlines expectations for the new school year and continues throughout the year with weekly professional development opportunities. A review of the summer professional development from August 25, 2016 reveals that leadership articulated high expectations for faculty and staff communication, workspaces, classroom environments, and professionalism. The agenda also included Vista Expectations for what “scholars will be able to do upon graduation.” Articulated expectations for scholars included questioning and posing problems, reasoning and communication, research, interpretation and metacognition. School leaders continue to provide clear expectations via consistent observation and feedback, a 2016 - 2017 Vista Academy Faculty Handbook of Policies and Procedures, and a weekly newsletter.

- The weekly newsletter is a venue for faculty and teachers to share weekly announcements and reminders of weekly professional development opportunities. Leadership also uses the newsletter to share teacher effectiveness expectations and reminders. A review of newsletters reveals that leaders share expectations for the implementation of the instructional focus on student engagement and highlight expectations for learning objectives, questioning, differentiation and scholar grouping. Weekly professional development announcements include Monday and Tuesday opportunities for both leader and teacher-led professional development sessions. In a December 2016 professional development session, teachers shared best practices around station teaching and foursquare writing. Teachers hold themselves and leadership accountable for expectations set by school leadership and by teachers in a variety of leadership roles including content and grade leaders. Leadership opportunities also include a variety of school-based committees including professional development, school culture and Young Men’s Initiatives.

- Teacher teams and staff systematically communicate a unified system of high expectations to students via a student handbook, learning objectives, meaningful feedback and guidance, and articulated criteria for success. Across classes visited teachers set clear learning objectives for students. Teachers provide students with consistent feedback and ongoing opportunities to improve their performance. Students re-submit work and projects to improve their performance scores and use criteria for success and teacher feedback to make revisions before re-submission. Students review their own performance after each interim assessment and make plans for improvement during Re-engagement Week. Leadership, faculty and staff engage students in a variety of college and career awareness activities including college awareness workshops, college trips, Vista Academy College Day, and a collaboration with Saint John’s University.
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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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based content team meetings and consistently analyze student work and interim assessment data on each grade level.

Impact

Professional collaboration and data-based action planning strengthens teacher capacity and leads to progress for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The majority of teachers participate in structured inquiry on content teams that meet weekly. Math teachers meet three times a week, humanities and science teams meet two times a week. Teams are led by teacher-leaders and there is a designated note-taker for each meeting. Teacher team meetings follow a pre-established agenda and identify a clear link to the schoolwide instructional focus and review or plan strategies to be used during the week. A review of agendas and notes demonstrate that teachers pose instructional questions, share practices, successes and challenges and identify possible solutions. A humanities agenda includes teacher questions regarding the use of stop and jot as a tool for making thinking visible. Questions included “What can I do after the stop and jot?” and “How might I use the stop and jot to push my instruction?” Notes for this team meeting included plans for peer intervisitations to observe best practices.

- Teachers interviewed shared that work on teacher teams has improved their practice and focused their instructional practices on targeted skills and the development of new teaching strategies. Teachers noted that together they have developed content-specific and schoolwide practices that have led to student improvement including, but not limited to the use of annotation, criteria for success and ACE as an organizational strategy. Leadership also notes growth in teacher practices that align to the teacher teams’ focus on student engagement. A review of teacher observation data demonstrates improvement in the Danielson Framework for Teaching domain that addresses instruction.

- Teacher teams consistently analyze interim assessment data for students within each content area and performance across the grades. Teachers use student work and data from interim assessments to identify target standards by grade. Teachers create action plans that analyze why scholars did not meet the standards and make plans for new instructional strategies to help students meet the standard moving forward. A science action plan identifies citing informational text evidence to support a claim as an area of need and determines that students did not have enough opportunities to practice the skill across content areas. New instruction in this plan includes using sections of text to discuss how it contributes to the whole idea of the text and the use of annotation to differentiate between important versus interesting information.

- Teachers note progress for students on targeted standards based on the implementation of new strategies. Humanities teachers highlighted improvements in scholarly writing structure and use of annotation between interim assessment one and interim assessment two. According to the 2015 - 2016 School Quality Snapshot, Vista Academy secured a rating of good to excellent for closing the achievement gap in English and math for English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and the school’s lowest performing students.