Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Validus Preparatory Academy
High school 09X263
1595 Bathgate Ave.
Bronx
NY 10457

Principal: Christopher Hibbert

Dates of Review:
March 30, 2017 - March 31, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Edward Hazen
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**

Validus Preparatory Academy 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**

### Instructional Core

<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>1.1 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 Finding</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</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>Developing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>Additional Finding</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>
</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>
</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>
</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>
</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to faculty, students, and families that promotes college and career readiness.

Impact
Expectations and supports result in accountability among the staff to ensure college and career readiness for all students and provides feedback to students and families regarding their progress so that students are adequately prepared for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- The schoolwide expectation of adequately preparing students for the next level is communicated to faculty and staff at the beginning of the school year and continuously throughout the year via a weekly newsletter that is emailed to staff every Sunday. The newsletter serves as a reminder to staff of the schoolwide vision and expectations and any upcoming deadlines, and highlights the school events for the week. Teachers reported that they appreciate the timely updates and stated that all staff read the email. Similarly, students and families receive monthly newsletters that contain pertinent college preparedness notices including grade point average (GPA) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores of the senior class and the number of college applications seniors had submitted to date. The school leader’s vision of preparing all students for the next level is also embodied in the visual acknowledgements that can be seen in the physical setting of the school. School hallways are adorned with college pennants from across New York State and the rest of the country and bulletin boards celebrating Honor Roll students and the number of colleges that were visited by seniors.

- Students are aware of the school’s expectations to have all students graduate from high school on time and apply to a college of their choice. School leaders and support staff reported that they strongly encourage students to earn a Regents score in the mastery level of 75 percent or higher to achieve their college and career readiness goals. All students are required to take the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) exam so that their progress toward college readiness can be determined and advisement on next steps can be shared with students and their families. Students confirmed that they are somewhat familiar with the College Readiness Index (CRI) and how it impacts their ability to get into a school of their choice. Students also stated that they keep informed of their progress using the online grade reporting system which they found extremely useful in monitoring their progress in their coursework.

- The school hired a dedicated director of college counseling through its partnership with College Bound Initiative (CBI) that coordinates efforts to ensure that students receive advisement and support to stay on track to graduate and meet requirements and deadlines for college applications. This includes assistance with completing college scholarship applications and financial aid forms. The advisor also provides guidance on what students need to do to prepare for a college of their choice and ensures that students are exposed to a variety of different types of higher education institutions through hosting a college fair. The students also take on site trips to college campuses. In addition, the school partners with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to provide students with college preparatory classes such as Regents and SAT prep on Saturdays. Senior students reported that they were extremely appreciative of the guidance and support that they had received in preparing for their high school graduation and college application requirements.
Findings
Across classrooms, teachers inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula or extension activities, reflecting uneven levels of student thinking and participation across grade levels and content areas.

Impact
Student academic tasks and discussions are not consistently differentiated, leading to uneven engagement in collaborative tasks and higher-order thinking and discussion for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- In some classes, teachers provided multiple entry points into the lesson by providing students with scaffolds such as graphic organizers, directions for worksheets translated to Spanish, and higher-order thinking question starters. However, this practice was not prevalent across most of the classrooms visited. In most of the classes observed, no extension activities were planned for in teacher lesson plans, nor provided to students during the lesson, so pairs or groups that completed an activity ahead of their peers were observed discussing topics unrelated to the lesson objective or task and sat with nothing to do until their peers finished with their work. In a biology class, students were required to work collaboratively to use a RNA codon chart to complete an amino acid chain. All students were provided with the same materials. Several students that completed the activity ahead of their peers were directed by the teacher to work on homework. Two students complied with the direction, two other students engaged in casual conversation, and three other students did nothing.

- Across classrooms, students were grouped together to encourage peer discussion and collaboration on tasks and work products. However, there was no consistency in grouping with intentionality or in creating structures to hold individual students or the groups accountable to the discussion, task, or expected outcome resulting in uneven levels and thinking and participation. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were asked to work collaboratively with a peer in a do now activity, in which they had to write down the parts of an argument essay and quiz each other on the list that they had generated. One student was observed with his head down on his desk until he was redirected by his peer to “get up.” Four other students did not write anything as directed to by the teacher, so they did not participate in the quiz-trade portion of the do now activity.

- In an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Earth science class, the learning target for the lesson was for students to “analyze my test so that I can see my struggles and fix them.” Students were required to collaborate in groups to review their test and determine how they could have broken down the question to arrive at the correct answer. Students were provided with a key vocabulary chart to record their answers. However, several students did not write anything. Some students were observed engaging in casual conversation, unfocused on the teacher’s follow-up prompt to the class to review the test, identify key vocabulary terms, and make corrections.
Findings
School leaders and staff have a process in place to ensure alignment of the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and plan rigorous academic tasks that are accessible for a variety of learners.

Impact
The curricula reflect planning, tasks with rigorous habits that build coherence across subjects and grades, and supports college and career readiness for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and departments, the instructional shifts demanded by the Common Core are evident in curriculum documents including unit plans and lessons plans. Across content areas, teachers require students to annotate their work, make a claim and cite text-based evidence to support their stance, and use accountable talk when participating in group discussion. Schoolwide, school leaders and faculty have made it a priority to have students write arguments to support claims using valid reasoning and sufficient evidence, as identified in the school’s Literacy Action Plan. Additionally, to ensure that students are college and career ready, a twenty-minute college block was added to students’ course load. Teachers created the curriculum for the class by using modified units of study from the College Collaboration Timeline curricula.

- School leaders ensure that inquiry teams meet to examine student work and performance data to inform revisions to curricula and academic tasks and that they are aligned to the schoolwide goals. A review of meeting minutes and agendas indicate that teacher teams meet to analyze student work products and data to identify patterns and trends and refine tasks to address identified gaps in student achievement. The school’s Literacy Action Plan requires all departments to include argumentative writing tasks in their units of study which ensures students will write a persuasive essay and cite textual evidence to support their claim. This academic task aligns to the articulated schoolwide goal that 85 percent of all students will be able to write a claim by June 2017.

- A review of curriculum maps, unit plans and lessons plans indicate that teachers plan for multiple entry points into a lesson for a variety of learners by adjusting the curricula and identifying possible scaffolds that could be used for the lesson such as graphic organizers, sentence prompts, and visual aids and cues. Some lesson plans include language supports for English as a New Language (ENL) students and modified materials for students with disabilities. For example, an eleventh grade U.S. History lesson plan identified students’ Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and modifications that would be used in the lesson to support students with disabilities to meeting the learning objective of the lesson, providing them with extended time, and modified worksheets and graphic organizers. Some teachers, additionally, included extension activities for higher level students in their lesson plans, such as self-reflective writing tasks.
Findings

Although subject area rubrics are aligned to the curricula, actionable feedback to students varies across grade levels and subject areas and the use of ongoing checks for understanding is in the process of development.

Impact

Inconsistent actionable feedback limits the opportunity for students to improve the quality of their work products. The uneven use of checks for understanding across grades and subject areas results in partial adjustments to the instruction and missed opportunities to clarify misconceptions for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grade levels and departments, teachers use rubrics to assess student work. However, the level of actionable feedback for improvement provided to students is varied from class to class. A review of student work samples indicated that students tended to receive feedback mainly on their writing tasks. Next steps for students to improve their writing was not consistent across all grade levels and content areas, as evidenced by the feedback provided by teachers. Some students received somewhat relevant feedback statements such as, “You have a few good details about the movies and text read in class. You don’t have much of an argument but more of a summary.” Other students received a rubric stapled to their work with checkmarks or circles on the criterion of the rubric with comments that did not align to the rubric or provide actionable next steps such as, “Great story! I hate turbulence, but love flying.” Most of the work samples from students had rubrics stapled to their work with the scores for each criterion area circled or checked off with no rationale for the scores or next steps for improvement from the teacher. Most students could not articulate how the circled or checked scores on the rubric could help them improve their writing.

- Although most teachers use rubrics to assess student writing products, there is no common grading practice, resulting in limited consistency with the quality of the feedback provided by teachers across departments and across disciplines. A lack of common language across grades and subjects results in uneven levels of understanding of the criterion for success among students. For example, although most ELA teachers use common rubrics, the absence of common language and normed feedback results in students not being able to articulate their next steps for improvement. Moreover, students could not make the connection of how the rubric was aligned to the one used for the Regents exam. One student that had received a score of level 3 on the rubric as well as a numerical grade of 85 percent and teacher feedback that stated, “Good story, but you could have added details in certain places to make it better” was unable to identify an area of improvement.

- Across classrooms, teachers inconsistently used ongoing checks for understanding to effectively adjust instruction, to clarify misconceptions for students. In an ELA class, students were directed to work together to analyze the differences between internal and external conflicts, while the teacher circulated around the classroom and listened in on students’ conversations. Students in one group had identified a stomach virus as an internal conflict and a broken arm as an external conflict. The teacher accepted their answers rather than direct them to correct examples and did not check with the rest of the class to see if they had similar misconceptions. This served as missed opportunities to provide students with exemplar responses and non-examples of internal and external conflicts to achieve the objective of the lesson for all students.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Supervision and Support | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

School leaders support the professional growth of teachers using a cycle of observation that provides actionable feedback to teachers, including next steps for improvement.

Impact

School leaders have an effective system that uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching to observe teachers and support their practice through follow-up professional learning opportunities, resulting in the adoption of common instructional practices that is leading to increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- There is an effective observation cycle in place that supports the professional growth of teachers and provides actionable feedback with next steps for improvement. School leaders have established a teacher team structure wherein the school’s “SWAINS,” or teacher-led department chair and grade level facilitators, meet either by department or grade level to share trends and patterns in pedagogical practice and students’ academic progress. Meeting topics are dependent upon teacher needs, which are identified by using formal and informal observation data. Areas of instructional practice in which teachers scored low in using the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric, along with the information from the analysis of student data and work products, are given top priority when planning meetings and professional learning sessions by the school’s instructional leadership team (ILT), which is comprised of administrative staff, instructional coaches, and teacher team leaders.

- Teacher teams meet weekly in collaborative groups by department to support each other with developing their professional practice. Planning of the sessions are informed by informal observation data and the analysis of student assessments and work samples. Teachers reported that during the professional development meetings, teachers typically share information on strategies, break into working groups, and collaborate on designing interventions for individual or groups of students. Departments also utilize the time to plan to make content socially and culturally relevant in addition to sharing ideas and resources to help make their lessons more engaging. Teachers stated that the weekly professional collaboration and learning sessions have been instrumental in improving their practice, particularly for those that are newer to the profession.

- Debriefed conversations from formal and informal observations serve as regular reminders to teachers on schoolwide expectations related to the instructional foci of the school which is text coding, answering higher-order questions, and peer to peer discussion (TAP). During these sessions, teachers receive feedback with next steps to improve the quality of their teaching. School leaders also communicate expectations via weekly newsletter emails and remind teachers of the “look-fors” that instructional leaders will be observing during their instructional walks. A review of teacher observation feedback indicates individualized comments to teachers with specific actionable feedback to improve their practice, such as a reminder to reference Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) chart to formulate their higher-order thinking questions.
**Additional Finding**

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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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</table>

**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based collaborations that align to the schoolwide goals, leading toward improved teacher practices and teacher involvement.

**Impact**

Increased instructional planning and collaboration have strengthened and improved teacher practices and leadership capacity which affects student learning across grade levels. Teachers have taken an active role in key schoolwide decisions related to teaching and learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry based professional collaborations to ensure the implementation of the Common Core across grade levels and subject areas. School leaders have created departmental teacher teams that meet weekly to collaborate on revisions to curricula and instructional resources and share best practices that support multiple entry points into lessons for a variety of learners. For example, in an eleventh-grade social studies lesson plan, in which the learning objective was to teach students how to write a Regents quality argumentative essay, the teacher identified Universal Design Learning (UDL) strategies for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) such as modeling how to use a Tic Tac Toe chart to organize thoughts while projecting it on the interactive whiteboard for a visual, and providing hard copies to students that are translated into Spanish. The work products generated by the collaborative teacher teams, such as lesson plans and unit plans, are shared at departmental meetings and posted to the school’s shared drive to allow access to the documents by all staff members, thereby strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers.

- Teacher teams use a structured protocol to examine student work samples to ensure that there is alignment to the Common Core and the instructional shifts and the school’s instructional foci. During a teacher team meeting, ELA teachers were observed using the protocol to examine student essays from a mock Regents to determine the quality of students’ argumentative essays and the depth of their text analysis and supporting textual evidence. Using the Regents writing rubric, teachers identified the students who scored 0-4 and categorized them into “low, medium, and high” students, then used their collaboration time to discuss noticings, wonderings, and possible next steps for supporting struggling students to meet the rigor of the task or push those that were close to mastering the task. Teachers noted that the task met the rigors of the Common Core, but identified specific students with disabilities and ELLs that would need additional support. Consequently, the team decided to have lower performing students pick two elements to focus on for their essay, either tone or figurative language. For the higher performing students, the team decided to challenge the students by having them write an essay on characterization.

- Distributive leadership structures are in place so that all teachers can participate in informal instructional observations, lead collegial discussions, and plan professional learning activities with their colleagues. Each teacher team has a team leader that is responsible for attending a bi-weekly meeting with the assistant principal to reflect on the instructional goals and reporting back ideas, issues, or concerns to their respective teams. School leaders use two master teachers as instructional coaches and staff development specialists to support the team leaders in their preparation to lead collaborative inquiry meetings and to plan professional development sessions for staff.