Quality Review Report

2016-2017

DreamYard Preparatory School

High School 09X329

240 East 172nd St.
Bronx
NY 10457

Principal: Alicia Wargo

Dates of Review:
March 28, 2017 - March 29, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier
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

DreamYard Preparatory School 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><strong>Instructional Core</strong></th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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</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>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</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>
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</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>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>Proficient</td>
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## Systems for Improvement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>
<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>Well Developed</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>
## Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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</table>

### Findings

School structures such as leadership, life-ready classes, and teacher teams foster and support the school-wide student and staff commitment to shared beliefs around culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional supports.

### Impact

The school’s approach to culture building, discipline, and social-emotional support is comprehensive, guided by student voice and interests, and results in a safe environment that is inclusive and respectful. Guidance and advisement structures are in place that have an impact on student academic and personal behaviors and put them on a path to success.

### Supporting Evidence

- Students from all grades participate in a leadership class facilitated by the principal. Leadership students discuss current events and issues or concerns around school culture and determine areas to focus on in which the whole school might benefit. Leadership students write a lesson plan that is delivered school-wide during life-ready class. During these sessions, students conduct discussion circles in which the targeted topic is explored in an environment in which students are free of judgment and are safe to share their deepest thoughts. These life-ready class circle sessions are then followed up by a whole school assembly in which the same topic is addressed. Leadership students determined that the Black Lives Matter movement would be a valuable topic on which the school community should focus shortly after the presidential election in January 2017. Leadership students planned and delivered lessons and follow-up assemblies focused on *appreciation*, shortly before Thanksgiving, and *stress less and be blessed*, in January. In addition, leadership students designed and facilitated a workshop on the use of circle discussions, along with other methods of restorative justice for school safety agents.

- Grade teams meet periodically to review students’ social-emotional and academic progress. Data analysis results in recommendations for students to become a part of the attendance team’s target student group. Grade team discussions and recommendations have assisted the Attendance Team in bringing the target of eighty-five percent attendance for this year within reach. Grade teams also conduct conversations around students’ academic success. For each student, areas of concern are identified and strategic interventions are employed such as referral to an advisor-led conference, home contact, success mentoring, and in-school counseling. This year, ninety-two percent of ninth-grade students are on track to earn ten or more credits. Tenth grade student credit accumulation of ten or more credits has risen to a possible seventy-one percent for this year. Whereas, the graduation rate in June 2016 was fifty-seven percent, the projected rate for current twelfth grade students is seventy-one percent. Student suspensions have also sharply declined to a current level of three. Grade teams also use their knowledge of their students to schedule kid-talk sessions. These sessions are facilitated by students while grade-team teachers observe from outside the student circle. Students have a conversation around questions about attendance patterns and their effect on grades, completion rates for assignments in and out of school, work habits and their impact on grades, as well as goals for life after graduation.

- All twelfth grade students pair with a teacher who becomes their “adopted parent” during the course of their final year of school. These adopted parents serve as their advocates, attendance monitors, academic and college application counselors. Students choose the adult with whom they wish to pair and therefore, are the people who initiate the adoption. While this program is catered to twelfth grade students and their specific needs, during a meeting with students of all grades, all students were able to identify which adult at the school they planned on adopting.
### Area of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts with an emphasis on academic vocabulary across grades and subjects. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

Curricula development builds coherence across subjects and grades and promotes college and career readiness for all students. Faculty members adjust materials for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs), without consistently planning for the highest-achieving students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence consistent alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and the integration of instructional shifts. For example, in an Algebra 1 lesson plan, students are to deepen their understanding of linear and exponential functions, as well as exponential growth and decay functions, through mathematical equation solving and narrative descriptions. In another algebra lesson plan, students are to apply math concepts to real-world applications as they determine whether or not a used-car purchase and a student loan are worthwhile.

- Curricular documents included assignments evidencing integration of the English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shifts. For example, all lesson and unit plans across grades and content areas reflect a targeted focus on academic vocabulary and a balance between fiction and non-fiction. In a grade-ten English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plan, students will write an essay in which they discuss how authors use writing strategies to reinforce the central idea of a text. In this essay, students must refer back to a play, poem, and two articles. Students are also tasked with supporting arguments with textual evidence in earth science, grade-eleven global studies, and grade-nine ELA lesson plans.

- Across grades and content areas, curricula are planned and refined so that diverse learners have access to challenging materials through placement in groups based on assessment data, differentiated materials, and a variety of available scaffolds. For example, a grade-ten Global Studies lesson plan indicates that students are assigned to groups based on assessment data and would receive sentence starters and checklists that have been scaffolded to their respective group’s need. An algebra lesson plan indicates each student’s pairing assignment for that lesson, based on a prior assessment. A grade-twelve English as a New Language (ENL) lesson plan indicates the leveled groups to which students of varying levels of English language acquisition are assigned and the different adults, including teaching assistants, who would be assigned to each group in order to monitor progress and offer support specific to each student group’s specific language needs. Additionally, glossaries and dictionaries are available to ELLs in lesson plans across grades and content areas.

- While some lesson plans evidence specific planning for the highest-achieving students’ access to the curricula, this level of planning was not evident across a majority of lesson plans. Algebra and chemistry lesson plans include higher-level Regents exam questions for high achieving students. A grade-ten Global Studies lesson plan includes differentiated checklists for three levels of student groups. However, there were an equal number of lesson plans that did not evidence the planning of activities or differentiated supports designed to specifically address the needs of the highest-achieving students in classrooms.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. In addition, students are engaged in meaningful discussions that warrant higher-level thinking.

**Impact**

The consistent provision of supports for ELLs and students with disabilities, along with leveled student groupings and strategic supports by a variety of adults, result in students demonstrating higher-order thinking in work products and in student-to-student discussions and work-sharing protocols that reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

**Supporting Evidence**

- In an algebra class, student groups included specific groups for ELLs and struggling students. During a grade-ten global studies lesson plan, while the materials were all identical, different groups were issued leveled checklists and sentence starters. In addition, laptop computers were issued to all students in the group needing the greatest level of support. With these computers and the accompanying headphones, students could listen to the questions being read aloud to them. In an Algebra class, ELLs received materials with translated directions and text while ELLs in all classes were able to access materials through the availability of dictionaries and glossaries. Additionally, teachers and teacher assistants strategically visit with student groups, or are assigned to specific student groups, in order to consistently provide support to students in need of ENL services or extra support as per their Individual Educational Plan. In one class, there are four teacher assistants who offer support to students in need.

- During an algebra class, students used a protocol to share understandings of the buzzwords, key vocabulary, addressed during the course of this lesson, challenging each other to support their definitions with supporting examples. In a chemistry class, students debated the different steps of a chemical reaction and at what point each step occurs. In an earth science class, all students turned to a partner to discuss the different ways that tectonic plate movement effects peoples’ lives. Additionally, in a grade-eleven U.S. History class, students were working with partners to discuss whether or not the New Deal positively or negatively changed the role of government in American society. After discussing these points, students then worked with partners to construct short written responses, using evidence from the text, regarding the different stages of the New Deal’s design and impact.

- During a grade-twelve ELA lesson on Shakespeare’s use of characterization, students conducted a turn and talk activity that involved discussing Hamlet’s character traits and how repetition was used in Hamlet’s “To Be or Not To Be” soliloquy to reinforce the central idea of that work. Students in a grade-nine ELA lesson were studying the conditions of factory workers and whether or not the conditions in which they work classify their products as ethically or unethically produced. These students also discussed ways in which they could determine the intent of corporations that produce low-cost fashionable clothing and whether or not the corporations are at fault or the consumers who create the market for these clothing items.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers and students use rubrics that are aligned with the school’s curricula. Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Teachers’ use of assessments and rubrics provide actionable feedback to students. Additionally, teachers guide students toward peer- and self-assessment and continually check for understanding during lessons, making adjustments in order to ensure all students’ needs are being met.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, samples of student work products showed teacher written actionable feedback. Some examples of that feedback directed students to read and edit their work, checking for mechanics and grammar usage. Additionally, students are advised to cite additional text-based evidence in supporting their arguments, include a sentence at the end of each paragraph that solidifies the argument made in that paragraph, avoid repeating words, strengthen an argument by completely revealing the counterargument, and to review the core concepts on which an argument is focused so that arguments are not based on fallacies. Written feedback focused on math advices students to explain how they arrived at a particular equation given the situation. In a science class, feedback speaks to students’ need to clearly show the bonds that tie together elements, and the need for students to utilize the academic vocabulary in the lesson in order to better understand related question prompts.

- One student reported and all present agreed that teachers’ written feedback has had a positive impact on his work. This student spoke about an example involving his U.S. History teacher. This teacher continually pointed his attention to run-on sentences. This student also spoke to how this affected his writing as it makes him pay much closer attention to mechanics and writing concisely. Another student spoke about how her math teacher’s feedback forced her to consider the value of explaining mathematical processes in narrative, short answer format. She closed her remark by stating, “I don’t forget that anymore!”

- Teachers consistently check for understanding in their classes, as well as have students conduct self- and peer-assessments, and make adjustments when necessary. In a grade ten ELA class, students shared essays with each other and used a rubric to rate their partners’ work. After checking in with three student pairs, the teacher called for all students’ attention, explaining that a number of students asked the same question and that everyone should hear the response. The students’ question pertained to how one should rate an incomplete essay. In a math class, students logged their peers’ understanding of the lesson’s buzzwords, offering comments on what could be improved and definitions which functioned as workable definitions. One student told me, “After we track our partner’s buzzwords and rate their responses, we then also write down our feedback to that student as glows and grows. Then we get our work back and have time to incorporate that feedback into our work and we then rate our own work with a better eye because we already rated someone else.” In a grade eleven ELA class, the teacher began a student-to-student discussion by stating, “After yesterday’s lesson, it became clear that you’re not adding-on to what other students are saying. During today’s discussion, focus on adding-on to other students’ comments.”
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

The school provides ongoing information to families regarding student progress toward college and career readiness. Teacher teams are developing a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

Communication from school leaders and teachers through systems such as an online grade book system provides opportunities for families to understand student progress towards meeting standards. A team of teachers work with administration to plan experiences and venues such as life-ready classes and senior seminar, designed to expose students to and prepare them for the high expectations of college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents regularly receive information about workshops where they are guided through tips on helping their children prepare for standardized exams, as well as the college application and financial aid process. Additionally, parents receive information catered to their students’ grade level that guides them toward an understanding of coursework and exam expectations, as well as the steps students will need to earn promotion to the next grade. The school utilizes an online gradebook system that enables parents to access their children’s grades on the internet at any time. Parents praised the school’s utilization of the online gradebook, sharing that the ease of access is helpful for parents to be constantly aware of their child’s progress.

- In partnership with a community organization, approximately forty internships have been awarded to students in grades eleven and twelve from this school, during the summer and school year. A career inventory was administered to grade-ten students in during the fall 2016 semester. The same career interest inventory will be administered to grade-nine students in the spring 2017 semester. Data from these career interest inventories will be used to plan career exploratory trips catered to students’ career goals. This same inventory will be used for incoming grade-nine students during the 2017-2018 school year and eventually, this same process will be utilized for students of all grade levels at the school.

- All students in grades nine through eleven take part in life-ready classes. These classes are designed around the school’s core values and serve as the venue in which academic support, exploration of college and career readiness is explored, and grade-wide initiatives are shared. A team of teachers work with the assistant principal to plan activities and lessons utilized during life-ready classes. Lessons cover topics such as resume and cover-letter writing for future job searches and college fair etiquette. Grade-twelve students take part in a class called senior seminar while all other students are taking their life-ready classes. Senior seminar involves a targeted focus on college and career readiness with workshops on college application writing, financial aid application processes, as well as the completion of a “Senior Brag Sheet” which guides students through collecting all of the celebratory information that they will reflect upon during college application and job interview processes. In addition, grade-based teacher teams select the student groups who take part in student-driven kid-talk sessions in which issues around social-emotional wellness as well as academic progress are addressed in an environment in which students are holding each other accountable for their growth while teams of teachers are present.
Findings
The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are embedded resulting in effective teacher leadership.

Impact
Collaborations within grade teams and the vertical inquiry team have strengthened teachers’ instructional capacity resulting in schoolwide instructional coherence and student achievement. Across the school within content-based teacher teams, teachers have an integral role in key decisions around instructional strategy foci which affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers serve on content-based teacher teams. The school-wide focus inquiry question, “What obstacles are preventing students from engaging in independent rigorous thinking?” drives the work of all teams. Each team analyzed data from common assessments and student work products to arrive at content-specific initiatives that address the school-wide inquiry focus. Evidence of each content area’s focus strategy was noted in curricular documents, as well as classrooms, across all grades. ELA and ENL classes are focusing on close reading strategies. Math and science teachers are embedding a focus on buzzwords. Social studies teachers are supporting students with the use of specific writing outlines and protocols. Agendas and teacher team meeting notes reveal that after the second administration of the interim assessment, student progress monitoring revealed uneven progress. Adjustments were made to curricula in response to this finding. Review of the interim assessment administered after these adjustments had been made reveals growth for all student groups, including students with disabilities as well as ELLs.

- Within teacher teams, teachers serve as a resource to their colleagues in strengthening their teaching capacity. One teacher spoke about the valuable feedback he receives from colleagues when they share their unit plans with each other. Another teacher spoke about his use of an online platform for students’ writing and editing essays that he uses due to the guidance of a colleague. Additionally, all teachers video record their intervisitations so that even when a small group of teachers is available for a specific visit, if a best-practice was observed and the visiting teachers determined that all teachers should see it, all teachers at this school can learn from that same example of teaching. One teacher reported and all present agreed that recording intervisitations has made their conversations more direct and based in evidence. All teachers have engaged in two rounds of intervisitations. Planning for the third cycle will begin with exploration of a common problem of practice to be determined at a whole-faculty meeting.

- Teacher leadership, within the structure of content-area teacher teams, determined the strategies that each team would use as a focus area across all grades within their respective content areas. Teachers’ votes were the main determination as to which inquiry process would be used across the school. Teachers play a key decision-making role on the team that creates life-ready class curricula as well as programming. The programming for the entire school is reviewed by teachers who can either accept the balance of students or determine that, in order to achieve a balance of students with disabilities, ELLs and general education students of varied levels, all groups are represented within each class.