Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Academy For Personal Leadership And Excellence
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 10X363
120 East 184th St.
Bronx
NY 10468

Principal: Angelo Ledda

Dates of Review:
May 11, 2017 - May 12, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart
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

Academy For Personal Leadership And Excellence 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

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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>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>
</tr>
</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</td>
<td>Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
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</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</td>
<td>Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>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>
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<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings
School leaders and staff regularly affirm their commitment to provide the highest levels of professionalism and instruction every day. Students understand the expectations that they are preparing for high school, college, and career.

Impact
Faculty and staff create an environment of mutual accountability. Students take ownership of their progress toward meeting standards and achieving next-grade readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Four days a week, the entire staff participates in a morning meeting to prepare for the day and to reinforce their commitment to each other and to the students. They share good news and celebrate accomplishments. A teacher shared that students had enjoyed a trip to a play and that a member of the audience had complimented her on the behavior of the students. The teacher further explained that, although it wasn’t any surprise that the students had behaved, it was interesting that the audience member felt it was unusual. Participants end this morning meeting with an oath that expresses their mutual dedication to their students, “I will commit myself to excellence every day and offer my best for my students without reservation. I will not allow myself to give up on a student nor allow them to give up on themselves.”

- School leaders communicate expectations that all members of the staff will help each other perform at the highest levels. In the introduction to the staff handbook, the principal welcomes all staff members to the team, “We will work collaboratively to ensure our students are successful, and we respect each other at all times.” These expectations are reinforced through formal and informal observations that include frequent learning walks with school leaders and teachers.

- Students are aware of the relationship between the work they are doing and the Common Core Learning Standards by which their progress is measured. Teachers identify the standards on assignments, tests, and exit tasks that include rubrics outlining what students are expected to do to achieve at the highest level. One test in a science class included a rubric that described that students must interpret information in graphs and charts into words in order to achieve a level four.

- Students explained that teachers prepare them by giving them work that is like the work they will do in the next grade or in high school. After the State tests in English Language Arts and math, teachers introduce topics that are in the next grade level curriculum. One student proudly indicated that as a result of this preview, he and his classmates are “going to be good at it” when they get to the next grade.

- In every class, students maintain a standards performance tracker that lists the standards that will be addressed during each unit of study. The students collect their assignments in work folders and record the rubric-assessed level of performance related to each standard on their tracker. Students articulate how tracking their progress toward meeting each standard helps them to understand what they need to do to improve their performance and to be prepared for high school.
## 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

Teachers plan engaging and challenging tasks for students by analyzing student work and data and reflecting on the implementation of those plans. The tasks are not always embedded in a coherent way across all grades and subjects.

### Impact

Not all curricular materials are differentiated so that English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and the highest achieving students are cognitively engaged and must demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use a shared drive to post information about lessons and units of study on a monthly calendar, including weekly reflections for modifying instruction in the upcoming lessons. They also provide summary information about how well students are mastering the skills and content. One reflection noted that the majority of students completed an exit ticket by correctly "identifying each organism that belongs in the food chain." Another teacher noted that ELLs were able to identify the author’s claim and cite text evidence but struggle “to identify whether the evidence is strong enough to support claims.”

- Teachers analyze student work and data to identify gaps in learning for specific students and groups of students. For example, teachers noted that students were stating opinions in a social studies essay, but they were not expanding their writing or citing evidence to support their opinions. The teachers determined that they would include explicit modeling of how to add elaboration in future lessons. Although teachers in other content areas found similar issues with their students’ writing, there is no schoolwide plan for addressing this common need across grades and content areas.

- While an English as a New Language (ENL) unit plan on how events and experiences impact our lives and personal identity outlined the learning objectives for students with varying levels of English language acquisition, the unit plan did not indicate instructional supports for each group of students and, similar to a unit plan in math on irrational numbers, did not include plans for higher achieving students. A math lesson plan identified the specific problems that two differentiated groups of students would complete, but it did not elaborate on how these problems addressed the needs of each group and further identified that the students would be grouped heterogeneously. A science lesson plan on renewable and nonrenewable sources of energy required students to complete tasks of varying levels of complexity on the topic of fossil fuels and included a challenge task. Such leveled tasks addressing the needs of a variety of students were not embedded in all lesson or unit plans.
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

Teachers provide a variety of entry points into the curricula for students, including those in co-teaching models of instruction, and students are engaged in meaningful tasks and discussions.

Impact

Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of engagement, thinking, and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers provide supports for students such as reviewing vocabulary words from the current unit of study at the beginning of the lesson or reminding students to use the word walls if they are unsure of a word. A math teacher reviewed the terms base, exponent, and hypotenuse before exploring the way the Pythagorean Theorem could be used to solve the real-world problems of how to ship a flagpole in a box or to determine how to safely place a ladder to paint a wall.

- An ENL lesson on how authors develop point of view included opportunities for students, who were grouped by English proficiency levels, to discuss the text, “The One and Only Ivan,” which was provided in both English and Spanish language versions. Students had access to vocabulary words with synonyms related to tone and mood. Translation paraprofessionals provided targeted support for ELLs in several lessons.

- Students in a social studies classroom discussed the image of a woman with her baby outside their home that was destroyed by the atomic bomb in Nagasaki. The students were making connections to themselves and discussing what it must have been like for this family. One student said that the photograph illustrated the horror of the event and “shows that we are all humans. They weren’t fighting. There was no one to rebuild their home.”

- In a lesson on fractions in a self-contained classroom, students made posters of how groups of children on a field trip could share sandwiches when there wasn’t one sandwich for each member of the group. Using their math congress protocols developed to ensure that the discussion was student-led and audience members were actively participating, pairs of students presented their charts to the entire class. One student explained that he and his partner “wanted to split them so it would be fair.”
Additional Finding

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

There is schoolwide use of rubrics and assessment tools, such as exit tickets, that are aligned to the curricula. Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward meeting learning objectives.

Impact

Teachers use information from assessments to identify groupings and adjust future instruction in order to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Students explained that they frequently complete exit, or occasionally entrance, tickets to demonstrate if they learned what was taught. The exit tickets are accompanied by rubrics so that students know exactly what is expected of them. For example, one exit ticket from a social studies class included a rubric that outlined the level of detail needed for a student to earn a level four. For a science class, an exit ticket required students to complete a Venn diagram, organizing information about the advantages and disadvantages of different energy sources. The accompanying rubric specified the standards associated with the task. In some lessons, the exit tickets, similar to the lesson, had scaffolded tasks.

- Teachers create common assessments that use questions that are similar to those students will encounter on State tests or Regents exams. Tests and quizzes often include multiple-choice, short-answer, and extended-response questions. For example, a science unit test on the solar system included a multiple-choice question asking students to identify a true statement about a diagram of the solar system. A different item on the same test required students to explain why Uranus takes longer than Mars to revolve around the sun. Teachers use data from administering *iReady* assessments to determine grouping of students for instruction. One teacher indicated that the groups in the class were determined by the reading levels of students. Another teacher indicated the groups were formed by the performance of the students with respect to the particular standard on analyzing author’s point of view. A group of teachers noted that having the *iReady* data also helped them to address gaps in student performance prior to the State exams.

- Teachers track the progress students make in meeting the expectations of the Common Core standards. Students maintain a progress tracker using the feedback from teachers to determine their level of performance related to specific standards. For example, students recorded their results on a task about finding percents, ratios, and proportions on their tracker associated with the standard on analyzing proportional relationships. Keeping this tracker provides teachers, parents, and students with up-to-date information on student progress.

- Feedback to students is rubric-based, and students understand what it means and what they are required to do to achieve the highest levels of performance. Some feedback is specifically actionable such as comments urging a student to use more synonyms instead of repeating the same word over and over. One teacher wrote to a student about the immense progress she had made from draft to published work, which illustrated the importance of citing relevant evidence from the text.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings

School leaders support teachers with feedback from strategically planned learning walks and observations that include looking at student work. School leaders identify strengths and actionable next steps that are based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

Impact

Feedback from school leaders reinforces the expectations for professional growth and reflection and leads to improvements in teaching practice and student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders regularly conduct observations of teacher practice with a focus on providing suggestions that are tied to improved student work. Results of these observations are aggregated and shared with the instructional support team to ensure that support is coordinated and consistent with respect to the rating and the component of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The instructional support team conducts regular learning walks and provides additional support for teachers during whole-staff and small-group professional learning sessions.

- Feedback to teachers is actionable. One observation suggested that the teacher should incorporate coaching breaks into the Socratic seminars so that students who are having difficulty expressing their thoughts or being more precise in their arguments can consult with a peer coach before the next round of discussion. Another observation from a different supervisor suggested that the teacher should use a note-taking device, known as a cruising clipboard in this school, to record information about student performance during a lesson. While observations capture the next steps, they may also praise the teachers for the work they are doing well. One teacher was thanked for opening her classroom to visitors “as a showcase for exceptional pedagogical practices that others should emulate.”

- Student work folders are examined by teachers and school leaders as part of the cycle of support and accountability. School leaders provide feedback to teachers using a template that outlines the quality of the tasks and the feedback that are expected to be present in the work folders. For example, one such review noted that the teacher was providing several next steps for students to take to improve their work. Another review for a different teacher indicated that not all pieces of work had comments and that, when present, they were not about what the student can do “to improve or gain mastery in a given standard or skill.”

- School leaders often share the low-inference notes that are taken during the observation process. Teachers noted that this has helped them to be more reflective of their practices and focused them on making improvements. One teacher was advised to make explicit in lesson plans the strategies the teacher would use to differentiate instruction based on content, process, or product. Subsequent observations of this teacher’s practice indicated the suggestion was implemented. The practice of including more detailed information about differentiation was also observed in other teachers’ lesson plans.
Findings

While in grade or content-focused groups, teachers analyze their own practice as well as student work and assessment data. Teachers take on leadership roles in their collaborative groups and other schoolwide committees.

Impact

Teachers take part in schoolwide decisions involving improvements to student learning. The collaborative inquiry process leads to shared improvements in teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers from all content areas were observed in a seventh grade house meeting at which they analyzed evidence of learning in recent student work. Teachers followed a process that required them to reach consensus about what the task required students to do and which standards were addressed and to identify the strengths and needs of each student. In addition, they looked for patterns and trends for the whole class and outlined possible strategies to include in future instruction for students whose performance was exceeding, meeting, approaching, or far below standard. Teachers, including those in co-teacher pairs, discussed the characteristics of the work and noted qualities such as “They [the students] are stating opinion but not going back to elaborate or cite evidence.” A group of science teachers determined that they needed to incorporate more writing into their tasks. Some teachers explained their strategy of having students highlight text, evidence, and opinion in different colors. Other teachers indicated they would model this practice for their students to see if it led to improvements in writing.

- The instructional support team, which comprises the teacher leaders from the other collaborative teams, regularly conducts learning walks focused on various aspects of teacher practices, such as room environment, student work, questioning techniques, and student engagement in higher-order thinking and discussion. The team reviews the evidence they gather from these learning walks and norms their thinking about the practices they have observed. Teachers indicated that receiving support from peers shows how school leaders “don’t just tell you to do something.”

- Teachers participate in a wide variety of committees that influence decision-making regarding school and student performance improvements. In addition to grade-level and content teams, teachers determine topics for professional development and meet to discuss the positive behavior incentive program. There is a committee focused on providing the best instructional strategies to meet the needs of the students on the autism spectrum. One teacher stated, and others agreed, “Nothing is done without collaboration. The administration is good at asking us to work on initiatives.”