Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Life Academy High School For Film And Music
High school 21K559
2630 Benson Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11214

Principal: Eugenia Kelch

Dates of Review:
May 21, 2018 - May 22, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Janine Kieran
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

Life Academy High School For Film And Music serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<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>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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### 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 Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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>
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Area of Celebration

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

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and checklists to supplement written feedback to students. Common assessments are used to determine student progress toward goals.

Impact

Students consistently receive actionable feedback. Teacher teams use common assessment data, including mock Regents and interim assessments, to inform grade and department curricular and instructional adjustments.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms and in all content areas student work reflects actionable feedback based on rubrics and checklists. Rubrics are designed for specific purposes, including compare and contrast, annotation, argument writing, introduction and conclusion paragraphs, and problem solving. For example, on a math rubric a teacher reminds a student to be careful with rounding numbers and to remember to use parentheses for multiple operations. On another, a teacher wrote, “Why do both options work? Be specific and clear in your explanations.” An English teacher reminded a student to use relevant examples from the text. A science teacher reminded a student to use patterns to determine hidden information. A student shared, and all present agreed, “Teachers use rubrics to grade you, and it shows you what you need to get a higher grade.” Teachers’ use of rubrics to provide actionable feedback to students on a consistent basis provides students with clear next steps so that they may increase their academic achievement.

- Teacher teams consistently use data including Measures of Student Learning (MOSL), Regents item analysis, mock Regents and interim assessments to identify student learning gaps. Student progress is analyzed to make curricular and instructional adjustments. Minutes from an English Language Arts (ELA) team meeting show that teachers used students’ MOSL results to identify a need for additional support in the analysis section of the argument essay. Teachers adjusted instructional strategies to include modeling, use of sentence starters, and the creation of an argument essay checklist. Teachers on the math team used previous Regents data to identify students who consistently skipped short response questions or did not get credit. Strategies including cataloging types of errors and the development of journal writing procedures were implemented. The practice of pre-problem solving tasks such as using annotation were identified as successful instructional practices as well. The social studies team used June Regents Global data from the multiple-choice section to identify the need for additional support in developing students’ lack of familiarity with academic and content vocabulary. Strategies such as increased annotating and the introduction of vocabulary at the start of every unit with consistent reinforcement were put in place to support students. Across content areas, teachers use common assessments to determine students’ progress toward goals and identify specific instructional strategies to support student achievement.

- The school administers mock Regents in ELA, social studies and science to track student progress toward goals. An online tool is used to assess students’ levels for specific standards. A mock English Regents administered in May indicated that students showed improvement in analytical aspects of the writing process and in identifying and justifying the central idea across multiple texts, but more support is needed in justifying text structures and sequencing, interpreting text in context, understanding and justifying the author’s point of view and evaluating and justifying literary devices. Data indicates that student scores increased from 50 to 70 percent as compared to the fall mock Regent sin ELA. Teachers’ consistent use of common assessment leads to customized instruction for students and in some cases, increased student mastery.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
The school’s approach to building culture, addressing discipline, and supporting students’ social and emotional needs is addressed through an emphasis on college and career readiness. Students are known well by at least one adult through mentoring groups.

Impact
A safe and inclusive environment results in students’ increased aspirations to college and careers after high school. Students feel valued and known well by staff; however, a lack of a theory of action that includes consistent structures for all students results in missed opportunities for these relationships to have direct results on all students’ academic and personal behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Structures, including partnerships with community-based organizations, colleges, college preparatory programs and mentor groups inform the culture of the school and results in students being known well by at least one adult. Grade-level mentoring groups are structured to meet in town hall settings or in small groups. Teachers report, and students confirm, that mentors advise them on their academic progress, encourage them to work hard toward goals and check-in on how they are doing. Members of the attendance team monitor all students’ attendance, and parents confirm that when their child is absent, they receive a phone call right away. However, grade-level mentoring groups do not meet consistently, and when asked, students did not know the name of their guidance counselor. Students in grade twelve reported that they learn about their academic standing on their own. While systems are in place for all students to be known and receive advisement, the lack of consistent structures for all students results in missed opportunities for student academic and personal behaviors to be directly impacted.

- Student, parents and staff report that the school is safe and inclusive. Data from the Office of School Safety indicates a trend of decreased incident reports over a three-year period. Specifically, there was a decrease in suspensions from 171 in 2017 to 37 in 2018 thus far. Students shared, “The school is a safe place, and teachers don’t discriminate.” Parents shared that the school addresses issues quickly, and they involve the parent, student, teacher and administrators when developing an action plan to ensure that matters are resolved. When asked about student voice being welcomed and valued, students shared that they were given the opportunity to plan a Violence Prevention Week. The student government planned this event with a teacher, and they conducted town halls, had a guest speaker, and organized a walk-out in response to gun violence in schools. Students feel safe and, at times, included in decision-making, though the structure for this is not based on a theory of action.

- Students report that the school has a strong focus on college and careers, and they are inspired to work harder to be college and career ready. Programs such as I Will Graduate, Avenue for Music, Advanced Placement for All, College Now and an Early College program at Long Island University are examples of ways in which students feel known well and inspired to select college options and/or careers after they graduate. For example, during a class visit to the I Will Graduate program, a student shared, and all present agreed, “This program has helped me to choose a career in music; it has shown me how to get there. People in this program care about us.” Students were clearly comfortable, and after they sat in a circle to share their thoughts, they went on to videotape student interviews. Similarly, during a visit to another program, Avenue to Music, students demonstrated strong bonds with each other as they planned an event for the school community. School partnerships help students feel safe, included and inspired to continue their studies and/or pursue careers upon graduation.
Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
Curricula promote college and career readiness for all students. Faculty members adjust materials through chunked texts, sentence starters, and other scaffolds that result in making tasks more accessible to the school’s diversity of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence Common Core Learning Standards the integration of English Language Arts/Literacy instructional shifts. For example, in a chemistry unit plan on the structure and properties of matter, students deepen their ability to use critical thinking as they are tasked with analyzing a global challenge, evaluating a solution to a real-world problem and to plan and gather evidence to compare the structure of substances. Academic vocabulary and content vocabulary are identified so that students will learn and use these terms in their responses. In a geometry lesson plan, students are tasked with creating an informal argument for the formulas for the volume of a cylinder, pyramid and cone. Similarly, academic and content vocabulary are identified, and the tasks are designed to require students to explain how to justify that volume is exactly one third of the corresponding prism. Lesson and unit plans demonstrate coherence and include higher-order thinking tasks that will prepare students for college and careers.

- Student work and data are used to refine tasks so that all students are cognitively engaged. An ELA unit plan includes a rationale and next steps section that is based on data from an ELA mock Regents administered in December 2017. It reads, “While the December mock Regents showed slight improvement, more had to be done to move students. Hence, using Shakespearean text allows for making meaning of a complex text.” A social studies unit plan indicates that the teachers revised checklists and scaffolded an essay so that students can make connections to the topic. Modifications for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities include modified texts, purposeful grouping, student choice and graphic organizers. Teachers’ plans consistently include modifications for ELLs and students with disabilities so that all students may be cognitively engaged. However, not all plans include extensions for high performing students.

- Curricular documents included assignments that incorporated the integration of math instructional shifts. A math lesson plan requires students to describe the spread of data, communicate mathematical ideas, build a rubric from a given text and verify the validity of methods and strategies of others. Students are tasked with creating a visual representation of a histogram and explaining why their representation is correct. A science unit plan requires students to use mathematical and computational thinking. Specifically, students are tasked determining how to measure mass and volume and identify significant figures and implement them in a mathematical equation. The intensity with which students are required to demonstrate their understanding across content areas prepares students for college and careers.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the articulated belief that students learn best when they are consistently engaged in discussion and the writing process. Student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact
Across content areas, students are engaging in various forms of writing assignments. Additionally, student discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, students engage in discussions in pairs and small groups and use protocols including fishbowl and four corners. In a math class, the four corners protocol is observed, as students are presented with a graph of data and are asked to select if they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, “Carl says that the best measure of center would be the mean for data as the average is unfazed by any noticeable outliers.” After students make their selection, they move to the corner of the room that corresponds with their answers. Students share their reasoning with each other. In a music class, the fishbowl discussion protocol is observed as students sit in inner and outer circles. They analyze various meanings of the song lyrics, and students in the outer circle provide input to their classmates in the inner circle. Discussion protocols, including statements such as, “I agree with…, and I want to add to what S1 said” are used. As a result of students’ consistent discussions that require them to analyze and reason, thinking was evident, and participation was high.

- The shared belief that students learn best when they are engaged in discussion and the writing process was observed across classrooms. In a chemistry class, students are placed in skill-based groups where they are provided with a guided worksheet on which they annotate a passage on nuclear fission and fusion. They are tasked with selecting one of two problems and collaborate to find the answer. Students are observed engaging in discussion as they strive to identify the answer, and for the culminating activity students are required to write an argumentative response that identifies their position with textual evidence. In an ELA class for ELLs and students with disabilities, students are grouped by home language, and they select a line from the book Night and write the meaning of the line. In their groups, they discuss why they chose the line and what meaning it has in the text. Students engage in various degrees of discussion based on their level of comfort with the English language, and their teachers encourage and assist them in the discussion process. Students and staff know that discussion and writing are a priority across all classes.

- In a living environment integrated co-teaching (ICT) class, students identify ways to reduce water pollution in an area with significant environmental issues. Students work in small groups and discuss ideas, including the use of a filtration system. Students select roles within the group including a facilitator, time keeper and note-taker as they collaborate to find ways to reduce water pollution. One student asked, “What can we add to make the water better?” Students write ideas as they prepare to present a written group proposal. In an advanced placement ELA class, students engage in the fishbowl protocol as they discuss the American Dream and their thoughts on border control. Students in the inner and outer circle completed an exit ticket on which they wrote what they learned, what they didn’t know and a question they still have. Students’ comfort levels with discussion, in small groups and during structured protocols, enables them to demonstrate their thinking.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to staff through ongoing feedback and professional learning aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School staff provides ongoing information to families regarding student progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact

Teachers understand expectations around teaching and learning and there is a system of accountability for those expectations. Communication from school leaders and teachers through an online grade book system and other strategies provides frequent opportunities for families to understand student progress towards meeting standards.

Supporting Evidence

- Ongoing communications and support by school leaders around classroom visits support teachers’ awareness of expectations around teaching and learning. Frequent classroom observations and non-evaluative class visits that include actionable feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching establish a high level of professionalism and improved teacher pedagogy. A review of observation reports reveals feedback on questioning and discussion, using assessment in discussion and engaging students in learning. Current data from Advance, the teacher evaluation system used in the Department of Education, reveals that 94 percent of teachers received effective overall ratings as assessed by the Measure of Teacher Practice (MOTP) system in Advance. Teachers report, and all present agreed, that the principal provides actionable feedback, and in collaboration with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) teacher center coach, teachers are provided with support so that they may meet expectations and improve their pedagogy. Teachers’ instructional capacity has increased as a result of frequent cycles of observations, non-evaluative class visits, and personalized support.

- All staff, including those new to the profession, are clear as to the expectations around teaching and learning. All staff receive a staff handbook that outlines administrative and instructional expectations. This includes the expectation that all teachers will participate in instructional rounds led by the UFT teacher center coach and department chairs to identify areas of strength and weakness in pedagogy and to norm teacher practice. Department chairs are also provided with a clear list of responsibilities so that they may meet expectations and support their colleagues. The principal provides teachers new to the profession a dedicated workshop entitled, Are You Asking the Right Questions? This workshop focuses on ways to engage students in higher-order thinking through targeted design of questions and academic tasks and the use of schoolwide discussion protocols. References to the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric and how to use it to improve planning are evident as well. Teachers are consistently provided with clear expectations.

- Online communication tools, workshops, emails, texts and phone calls keep parents apprised of expectations for college and career readiness and feedback that enable them to support their children. A workshop on the college application process, including the financial aid application form, was provided to parents in the fall. A parent information session on expectations for college tours also took place. Parents reported receiving resources from teachers that they use at home to support their child’s academic progress. This included several online math programs and books for their children’s use at home. Parents were clear that their children had to meet college readiness standards on Regents exams. They referenced after school programs such as Regents Preparation classes and Scholastic Aptitude Test preparation as support programs that ensure their children are college ready. Parents understand their children’s progress and recognized the expectations for college and career readiness.
Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams consistently analyze data and student work for students they share.

Impact

Teacher collaborations strengthen instructional capacity. Teacher team work has resulted in progress in students' writing and math skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers strengthen their instructional capacity through team collaborations. Teams conduct instructional rounds that mirror the observation process. Evidence reveals that this practice takes place across content areas. Teachers engage in a lesson study session prior to the instructional round, and they collaborate on the lesson design. All teachers on the team deliver the same lesson, and they observe each other to provide warm and cool feedback. Organizers are used to identify two to three components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching on which the teacher wants feedback. One teacher’s feedback to a colleague included, “Great rapport with students, and it is good that you are developing students’ listening skills. Provide more instructions for finding quotes.” Minutes from a team meeting reflect that teachers used a tuning protocol to assess student engagement in a colleague’s class after an instructional round. Warm feedback includes incorporating vocabulary in the lesson and use of differentiated materials. Teachers also wondered if student engagement would have increased with the use of real-world examples. Teacher collaborations ensure the sharing of feedback and effective practices that has resulted in a trusting environment and improved teacher practice.

- Weekly planners are developed and provided to ICT special education and English as a New Language teachers in advance so that they may prepare learning supports for ELLs and students with disabilities. Common Core Learning Standards, lesson topic and aim questions, learning targets, writing skills and vocabulary and language acquisition strategies are identified. Additionally, teachers identify purposeful groupings and modifications for students with special needs. Teachers report that this tool leads to improved teacher planning and practice for students who require additional supports.

- All teacher department teams have a theory of action based on student data. Mock Regents, interim assessments and item analyses from June 2017 Regents data are used to inform next steps for teachers. Data in math reveals that an additional 22 percent of students earned points on the January 2018 Common Core Algebra Regents as compared to the June 2017 results in the Seeing Structure in Expressions Standard Cluster. Teachers determined that students should journal their errors, including goal reflection and a narrative of why they chose a strategy. Data in ELA reveals that an additional 19 percent of students were able to develop claims and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly on the spring mock ELA Regents as compared to the one administered in the fall. Teachers introduced students to more formal styles of reading and writing and provided various scaffolds to support students. Social studies’ data reveals 13 percent of students attempted the thematic essay on the fall mock Regents in global history as compared to 75 percent of students on the spring mock Regents due to increased explicit use of rubrics during instruction. Across content areas and as a result of teachers’ strategic planning based on data, groups of students demonstrate progress.