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>
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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>Well Developed</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 Quality Ratings continued

### 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>Additional Finding</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

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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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability exists around the use of consistent meeting norms, daily morning meetings, and other communication tools. Information sharing and communication with families through online platforms support students in their academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are shared with teachers via weekly emails and handbooks covering a vast array of school governance and instructional topics. The faculty handbook includes policies regarding schoolwide grading procedures, homework design, and the use of an online gradebook. It also includes a schedule for teacher inter-visitations that makes clear the focus area of the Danielson Framework for Teaching for each month. In addition, announcements are projected onto an interactive white board in the main office that all faculty members read upon arrival to the school each morning. Another method for sharing high expectations with staff is the emails sent by the principal each Sunday that contain information about upcoming academic deadlines and events for the week.

- Teachers hold each other accountable through a process of role rotations during team meetings. One teacher shared, and all present agreed, "We support each other as well and navigate through the work. All meetings begin with norms. We can talk with each other and know that we’ll get honest feedback." Another teacher spoke about the value of using the same norms consistently across teams so that teachers can easily join other teams and participate. We hold each other to the same norms and begin every meeting by stating them. Teachers also shared that they appreciate and expect the Sunday emails from the principal and the daily morning meetings during which school leaders and all faculty members announce upcoming events, assessments, and publicly celebrate each other through shout-outs. Additionally, one teacher stated, "We benefit from this structure so much, just like our students benefit from their structure. We rely on all of it, including the morning meetings which are just like a homeroom for us!"

- Through the use of a variety of tools that includes internet gradebook platforms, emails, text messages, phone calls, a handbook for families, and a workshop series, school leaders and teachers communicate with parents and have partnered with them to support their children’s success. Additionally, each school year is launched with a Family Night event and faculty members conduct summer home visits to ensure that incoming sixth-grade students are being prepared for the transition to middle school. Workshops for parents cover topics ranging from the services available to parents of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, grade-specific assessments and expectations, as well as strategies parents can use to help their children strengthen their reading and math skills. Parents praised the school for constantly sending useful resources to them. One parent shared that she helped her son focus his preparation for a science exam due to the information available through the online gradebook and that this helped him earn a high grade on that exam. Other parents shared that they helped their children complete homework using the sample math, English Language Arts (ELA), social studies, and science questions and the different online resources that parents could use in order to help their children while at home.
Area of Focus

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

Findings

Written feedback issued after classroom observations accurately captures teachers’ strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. An effective system drives the use of teacher observation data in the design and facilitation of professional learning (PL), as well as informs decisions regarding teachers’ assignments.

Impact

While feedback to teachers makes clear the expectations for teacher growth and the supports available to help teachers meet them, the feedback is not currently aligned to goals for professional growth. Additionally, modifications to PL and teacher assignments do not presently result in improved student success.

Supporting Evidence

- Observation reports include feedback that captures teachers’ strengths and weaknesses, and are accompanied by next steps teachers should take to improve their practice and student success. For example, in one report the teacher was praised for pushing students’ thinking without giving away the answers and for incorporating a protocol to have students discuss math processes with each other. Feedback given to this teacher was focused on the teacher planning for anticipated misconceptions and the strategies that could be employed to help students work past them. Another report highlighted the teacher’s progress in differentiating instruction based on students’ reading levels. Feedback advised the teacher to actively track students’ progress throughout each lesson to deepen the differentiation that could be offered for individual students. Other examples of feedback to teachers advised them how they could share learning targets with students so that they could understand the criteria for the lesson, allow students to have time to formulate a response to verbal questions, and to ensure that all student groups are visited by a teacher so that students’ understanding could be periodically checked throughout the lesson.

- While feedback to teachers offers actionable next steps that teachers can use toward pedagogical improvement, this feedback is not aligned with either the professional goals that teachers set for themselves or the goal embedded within the schoolwide focus. As articulated by school leaders, a review of teacher observation data from the prior school year was used to determine the schoolwide focus on the engagement and assessment of students. A review of observation reports evidences inconsistent references to these goals in the feedback given to teachers, and reports in which no feedback aligned to these goals was offered.

- School leaders review classroom observation data during the summer to determine the PL foci for the school year. Prior to each classroom observation cycle, school leaders meet to discuss how trends in teachers’ practice might be used to modify the PL plan. While the original plan for the final PL cycle of the school year was supposed to be a book study, school leaders found that teachers across grades needed to develop their skills in facilitating small-group student discussions. As a result, the PL cycle was redesigned to meet that demonstrated need. In addition, teacher assignments were modified so that targeted attention could be given to the seventh-grade students in response to data from the prior school year. While data from observations of teachers and of student data result in PL decisions and modified teacher assignments, these changes have not resulted in demonstrable improvements in the quality of student work.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

Across grades and subjects, rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills requires that all students demonstrate their thinking. All students have access to the curricula and are cognitively engaged through differentiated groupings and assignments.

Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plans include activities requiring students to demonstrate their thinking either orally or in writing. A grade-eight Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) ELA lesson plan indicates that students will work collaboratively to design questions about *Romeo and Juliet* or *Bronx Masquerade* that span the Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) levels. Students are also required to justify their questions’ DOK alignment. A grade-six ELA lesson plan for a class devoted only to students with disabilities indicates that students will identify and analyze a song’s similes and metaphors. Students will then discuss and support their findings with a partner. In a grade-eight social studies lesson plan, students are to prepare for a debate about the Vietnam War by annotating informational texts and then test their arguments with students in their group. Similarly, a grade-six social studies lesson plan indicates that students will read and annotate an article about ancient Greek gods’, goddesses’, and heroes’ flaws. Afterward, students will share and defend their notes with partners and determine the strongest pieces of evidence. In a grade-eight ICT math lesson plan, students are to use the Pythagorean Theorem to find the distance between two points on a coordinate plane. Afterward, students are required to narratively discuss the steps taken to solve the problems. A grade-six ICT math lesson plan indicates that students are to analyze expressions with exponents and determine whether they are equal by evaluating the expressions or applying their understanding of exponents.

- Students in a grade-eight ICT math lesson plan would be homogenously grouped based on assessment data and receive leveled assignments toward the goal of strengthened understanding of the Pythagorean Theorem. A grade-six ICT math lesson plan indicates that students would also be grouped based on assessment data and that each of the stations through which students would circulate include extension assignments for those who complete tasks early. Similarly, a grade-eight science lesson plan indicates that students would be grouped according to assessment data and receive leveled work that is complemented by leveled extension questions.

- A grade-eight ELA lesson plan evidences planning for all learners in its parallel teaching design and in the differentiation of learning within each of the two primary groups. A grade-six ELA lesson plan indicates that while students in the higher performing group would work independently, students in the other two groups would either work with a partner and have frequent teacher check-ins, or have a teacher assigned to sit with them and offer targeted, hands-on support. Additionally, a grade-six social studies lesson plan indicates that students would be grouped based on reading level and that ELLs and students with disabilities would receive additional scaffolds and supports such as sentence starters to help them make their thinking visible, and a copy of the text with vocabulary words in bold with definitions supplied.
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the articulated belief that students learn best when they are required to justify and support their thinking with evidence. Students participate in discussions that involve high-level thinking.

Impact

Across content areas, students share and defend their work with peers. While student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation, this is not evident across the vast majority of classrooms at this time.

Supporting Evidence

- During a grade-eight math class, the teacher asked students to write an answer, explain the process and discuss the “why.” In an ELA class, grade-eight students in one group collaboratively created a set of varied DOK-based questions around *Romeo and Juliet*. In order for a question to be recorded on the worksheet, students needed to share their draft questions along with the thinking that led to their design. The other group worked collaboratively to create a character based on contextual information from *Bronx Masquerade*. Students brainstormed ideas and shared possible context clues from the novel to either support or refute possible character traits. Additionally, students actively challenged each other in a social studies class while preparing for a debate on the Vietnam War. Students marked arguments as viable if the thinking behind an idea was presented along with the argument’s supporting evidence.

- Students in a grade-six English as a New Language (ENL) class reviewed their annotated copies of a passage about competitive sports in preparation for an in-class debate that they would later conduct on whether competitive sports are harmful or helpful. One student explained that they were discussing which quotes and other pieces of evidence they would use during the debate. Students in a grade-eight ELA class wrote questions about character traits from *Tears of a Tiger*. Students then took turns asking each other those questions followed by a discussion about the possible answers. Additionally, all students in a grade-eight math class collaborated as they circulated through different stations.

- There were also a few classes where most students participated in collaborative work while some chose to not participate. For example, students in a grade-eight science class were engaged in small group student-to-student discussions around the annotations they had just completed on a text about humans’ impact on the environment. However, there were students in each group who did not engage in the discussion.
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 use rubrics and checklists that are aligned with the school’s curricula to inform feedback to students. Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals.

Impact

Students utilize teachers’ actionable feedback to increase their achievement. Teachers use data from State exams and other teacher-developed assessments to design intervention strategies.

Supporting Evidence

- Student work samples across subject areas contain teacher-written actionable feedback that students use to improve their work. For example, feedback to students in a grade-eight math class reminded them to show and explain their work, include a key when creating a table, and to use more than one strategy to solve an equation. Feedback regarding a science assignment to grade-eight students addressed the need for evidence citation, correction of punctuation and spelling errors, as well as diversions from use of the scientific method. Additional feedback examples included teachers guiding students toward focusing on analyzing evidence so that it clearly supports a claim, completely describing how the use of manipulatives in an algebra problem resulted in an equivalent expression, and how to properly include and support a counterclaim in an essay. Students reported that they are able to use feedback from their teachers to improve their grade on subsequent assignments. Specifically, one student shared that he was able to resubmit short-response answers on an end-of-unit assessment. The resubmitted response included the evidence he had not originally included and, as a result, his grade increased accordingly. Other students shared similar anecdotes about their use of feedback from their teachers in order to improve specific assignments.

- Teachers use State exam data to determine the instructional focus and anchor standards for the year. After analyzing math exam data, teachers found that students were struggling with critiquing arguments and using precision. To address this need, teachers decided to increase student-to-student discussion during which they would be required to justify their thinking. Analysis of ELA exam data evidenced a need to focus instruction on reading comprehension. Similarly, teachers decided to complement reading activities with student discussions during which they would be required to make and support claims about reading passages. These practices were observed in classes across grades and content areas and are being implemented during extended learning activities facilitated during homeroom.

- Teachers of science and social studies also use State exam data as a baseline and administer teacher-created assessments throughout the year to track students’ progress. While data resulting from these assessments, as well as in ELA and math classes, drive the creation of instructional foci and the design of leveled student groups, there was no evidence to show that student data in these content areas is being tracked for progress in such a way that would reveal that all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have demonstrated increased mastery.
**Additional Finding**

<table>
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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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**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. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

**Impact**

Teachers' collaborations within content teams and working groups focused on specific instructional strategies strengthen their instructional capacity. Teachers have a voice in decisions regarding PL, inquiry, and schoolwide initiatives.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers participate in multiple teams. This work primarily occurs within the grade-house teams. During the school visit, the grade-six house team met to review student work. Teachers initially sorted student work into one of the following categories: objectives met, partially met, or not met. Teachers then read through samples of work from each category, discussing and identifying the prerequisite information of which students demonstrated knowledge. Teachers then discussed students' misconceptions, factual errors, and unsupported conclusions. They then explored the learning needs for each category, classwide trends, and the instructional strategies that might address them. Math teachers decided that the next lesson's exit slip would be introduced following a targeted modeling session by the teacher and that a topic for consideration at the next meeting would be how to support students in setting up and using graphs.

- Review of grade- and content-based house team minutes evidence that teachers are meeting to look at student work and make decisions regarding modifications for individual students as well as improvements that teachers can make to their instructional practices. For example, the grade-six team minutes show that decisions are regularly made that determine the different intervention strategies that will be used for each of the four major content areas, as well as art. Similar work is conducted by all grade-based teams concerning students who are identified as being on the cusp of reaching mastery in ELA and math. Additionally, teachers within teams conduct inter-visitations that are organized around specific topics of analysis. During these inter-visitations, teachers use a note-taking sheet to record evidence of the instructional focus in lesson plans, student work, teachers’ written feedback, and how the student work posted on bulletin boards reflects students’ progress.

- Teachers serve as leaders of grade- and content-based teams. In addition, teacher leaders serve on the Instructional Support Team, which makes decisions around the direction of PL and focus questions for inquiry cycles. An example of a decision in which teachers had a voice was in the design of rubrics transparently aligned to standards. Evidence of the use of these rubrics was observed across grades and content areas. Regarding this initiative, one teacher reported, and all present agreed, “I think it changed how we do things at the school and allowed us to go deeper into the standards. It helped us better understand and teach to the standards, and students now also have a better understanding of the standards.”