Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Preparatory Academy for Writers: A College Board School
Secondary School 29Q283
143-10 Springfield Boulevard
Queens
NY 11413

Principal: Charles Anderson

Dates of Review:
November 13, 2018 - November 14, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Lisa Reiter
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

Preparatory Academy for Writers: A College Board School serves students in grade 6 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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<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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>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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<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>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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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>Proficient</td>
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<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>
</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>
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</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 to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact

Communication around high expectations and professional learning results in a culture of mutual accountability. All students own their educational experiences through structures such as portfolio presentations and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently message the belief that teacher development is critical for student growth and support high expectations for improved teacher practice and achievement of school goals with extensive learning experiences. Communication and accountability are conveyed schoolwide in the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) and through classroom observations and professional learning experiences. Teachers receive ongoing professional learning connected to key elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and teacher-identified needs. The professional development (PD) committee, led by a teacher leader, provided a survey to teachers to understand their learning needs better. The survey was used to provide differentiated teacher-led PD. For example, during one PD, teachers chose from sessions facilitated by their peers on using data, technology in the classroom, providing modifications and accommodations, and mental health. Therefore, a culture of mutual accountability exists between school leaders and staff that results in teachers receiving training to meet schoolwide expectations.

- School leaders communicated a philosophy of PD that includes the expectation that teachers self-assess their practice and make choices about which professional learning experiences will best support their practice. School leaders believe, and teachers confirmed, that this approach creates a culture of mutual accountability around instructional expectations and supports available to teachers. For example, one teacher requested an additional observation and planning session with his administrator for further support in developing effective questions. Another teacher shared the staff’s expectation that colleagues come prepared to meetings, in order to provide each other with feedback and support.

- Teacher teams communicate and support the expectation that all students continually self-assess and reflect on their progress to prepare for colleges and careers. All students complete portfolio presentations three times a year. Students use unit overviews to organize and present their work to school leaders, teachers, and peers. Students receive support in this from their advisory teachers, as they engage in data analysis and develop goals based on their current progress. Additionally, all students include a personal essay that aligns with the format and expectations for a college application essay. As a result of this process, students demonstrate ownership of their educational experiences. During the student meeting, a grade 12 student shared that portfolio presentations build goal-setting and communication skills that will help when she is in college. Additionally, there has been a 10 percent increase in the school’s college readiness score and a 12 percent increase in post-secondary enrollment. Moreover, students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, earn college credits through College Now and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
Area of Focus

<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 an articulated set of beliefs that students learn best when cognitively engaged in authentic tasks that foster collaboration and discussion. While teaching practices consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, high-quality supports and extensions vary across classrooms.

Impact

Students across classrooms produce meaningful work products, though in some cases there are missed opportunities to deepen students’ thinking. All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- The articulated set of beliefs on how students learn best includes using three different stations for lessons aligned with the skills of reading, writing, and discussion. This was evident across classrooms and led to meaningful student work products. For example, in a grade-six math class, students worked in one of three stations. Students in the discussion station received support from the teacher as they collaborated on ideas about how to solve a word problem. Students in the other stations worked on either iReady or discussed with a partner how they solved a word problem. In a grade ten English class, students also worked in three stations aligned to reading, writing, and discussion. Students in the discussion station provided one another with feedback on a piece of writing, students in the reading station read a text and completed a reader’s notebook entry, and those in the writing station wrote a response to a prompt connected to the novella Animal Farm.

- While teaching practices were aligned to the articulated beliefs, in some classrooms there were missed opportunities to deepen students’ thinking. For example, in a grade nine Living Environment class, students in the discussion station answered questions the teacher asked regarding the food web rather than engaging in discussion with each other. When the teacher asked what could cause a shortage, one student said weather, and the teacher followed up by asking what would happen to the hawks during a shortage. Another student responded that the hawk population would decrease. Consequently, the teacher kept the focus on teacher-student interaction rather than fostering student-student discussion.

- While all students had access to various supports such as wall charts, notes, and teacher support, strategic supports and extensions are not yet evident across the vast majority of classrooms. For example, in a grade six math class, students completed one of three math word problems aligned to their levels and worked independently through a differentiated online math program. In a Global History class, students received differentiated texts and writing prompts. However, such strategic supports and extensions were not apparent across the vast majority of classrooms. For instance, in an Algebra 2 class, all students completed the same tasks and had access to the same support. As a result, some students were able to complete the task quickly, while other students needed additional support.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<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 the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts, such as writing from sources. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Decisions about curricula build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. Faculty members ensure a diversity of learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have access to the curricula and tasks, and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence consistent alignment with the Common Core and the integration of the math instructional shifts. For example, there is evidence of the math shift of deep understanding in a grade six unit plan that includes a task in which students create a song, letter, or poem explaining the greatest common factor and least common multiple. Additionally, included in an Algebra 2 lesson plan are questions that require students to explain why an exponential function does not have minimums or maximums.

- Review of curricular documents reveals the integration of the English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shifts. Additionally, school leaders have identified three pillars--reading, writing, and discussion--to be included in all planning documents. As an example, a grade-six lesson plan includes tasks aligned to those pillars, as well as the Common Core and instructional shifts. A grade-nine lesson plan features a task in which students analyze the allusion to “nothing to fear but fear itself” from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s inaugural address in To Kill a Mockingbird and include textual evidence in their responses. A grade six lesson plan includes a task in which students use textual evidence from various articles to support their responses to questions. A grade seven social studies unit plan includes a task that requires students to analyze multiple documents and readings related to the Dred Scott Case and then determine whether the Supreme Court was biased in their decision. Students are required to include textual-evidence and write from various sources as they complete this task.

- Teachers differentiate curricula and academic tasks using student work and assessment data such as reading levels, so all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are cognitively engaged. A review of curricula reveals some lesson plans include leveled reading materials or tasks. For instance, in a Global History lesson plan, students will complete a reading and writing prompt at one of two levels. The lesson plan also includes which students will receive each level. A grade-nine lesson plan includes an abridged version of the reader’s notebook entry for students who need additional support. However, in an Algebra 2 lesson plan, while it indicates students are grouped heterogeneously, it does not include specific supports or extensions for students.
Findings
Across classrooms, teachers and students use rubrics aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact
Teachers provide actionable feedback to students both in writing and verbally. Additionally, teachers check for understanding through whole-group questioning and conferencing, and make adjustments to ensure all students' needs are met.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, samples of student work products showed written actionable feedback by teachers. Some examples of that feedback direct students to explain their evidence to support their arguments, include personal opinions in conclusion paragraphs, and proofread to ensure proper spelling and grammar. Specifically, one student was commended for having a focused thesis and good information. Next steps for this student included, "discuss the Russian Revolution's effects in more details," and "include more of an opinion in your conclusion." Feedback and rubrics on math tasks and journals include pushing students to use math vocabulary and reminders to set up problems correctly. However, there were also a few examples of student work with only numeric scores or no feedback at all.

- During the student meeting, students agreed that teachers' written feedback has a positive impact on their work. One student shared that she received feedback to use higher-level vocabulary. She explained that meant instead of using words like happy or sad, she should use words like enthusiastic or depressed. Another student shared that he received verbal feedback on how to dissect a chemistry problem that helped him understand what the question was asking. Several students also explained that feedback on math exams helps them prepare to retake the exam. Thus, students receive actionable feedback regarding their progress and achievement.

- Teachers check for understanding and make adjustments to instruction, as well as have students conduct self-assessments. Across classrooms, teachers used whole and small-group questioning to check for understanding. For example, in a grade six math class, the teacher asked a small group of students what mathematical operation was needed to solve the problem they were completing. One student stated division and explained why division was the correct operation. After hearing the explanation, the teacher moved on to check-in on a different station. In another classroom, the teacher informed students that she created an additional template with sentence starters for students to use based on their writing from the previous day. However, in some classrooms, teachers' methods of checks for understanding, such as whole-group questioning, did not allow them to gauge their classes' understanding and make adjustments. In addition to teachers' checks for understanding, students often self- and peer-assess their work using a rubric. In a grade-ten English class, one student provided feedback to a peer about a writing assignment and said, “It is a two because you are not giving enough examples.”
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

School leaders support teacher development with frequent classroom observations, both evaluative and non-evaluative, and mid-year and end of year meetings that include assessment analysis. Prompt written feedback captures teachers' strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Evaluative and non-evaluative observations by school leaders result in feedback that promotes professional growth and makes clear both the expectations for teacher practice and the supports available to them.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Each rated item includes specific, detailed evidence from the observed class to support the rating. Next steps for teaching improvements are included at the close of each observation report. Observation reports frequently reference when the school leader will return to see the feedback implemented. School leaders also meet with teachers to discuss the effectiveness of their teaching practices, in comparison with scholarship reports from their classes. Additionally, school leaders discussed a strategy of observation cycle planning that includes assistant principals focused on teachers in specific departments, with all formal observations being conducted by the principal. Teachers receive verbal feedback from non-evaluative observations, which are frequently conducted in the weeks following an evaluative observation.

- Observation reports contain feedback that captures teacher's strengths, weaknesses, and is accompanied by next steps teachers should take to improve their practice and have an impact on student success. For example, in one report the teacher is commended for developing a positive and professional rapport with students and providing students with a discussion protocol. Next steps for this teacher included embedding time for partner talk to include more students in the discussion. In another observation report, the teacher is commended for implementing previous feedback connected to assessing students. Next steps included using data collected during the lesson to inform future lesson plans and to continue using discussion strategies reviewed during the vertical team meeting.

- In addition to evaluative observations, school leaders conduct non-evaluative observations and provide feedback to teachers. Teachers came to a quick consensus that the frequent, non-evaluative observations that they receive, including verbal feedback, support their development. One teacher shared that, at her request, she receives additional non-evaluative observations to support her growth in implementing feedback on discussions. Another teacher shared that she received helpful feedback on implementing the reading, writing, and discussion stations in her classroom.
**Additional Finding**

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<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 collaborations such as vertical teams. Teacher teams consistently analyze data and student work for students they share.

**Impact**

Teacher collaborations, such as departmental and grade-level team meetings, have strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers connected to curriculum development and instructional strategies. There is evidence of progress towards goals for groups of students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- As a result of the work of teacher teams, the instructional capacity of teachers is strengthened. For instance, the ELA department met to review the skills needed for success on the AP Language exam and determine where they could be embedded into the curricula of other grades through writing assessments. The AP Language teacher shared the nine-point rubric that is used to assess student writing. She included exemplars of students' work from this exam at various levels and explained what the writing needed to move to the next level. As an example, the teacher noted that an essay that received a score of five would need greater development to move to a higher level. The team agreed that they would look at their curriculum maps to determine where they could add or adjust an assessment to address these requisite skills. Moreover, a grade six teacher shared her curriculum map with the team and discussed the adjustments she was considering. She shared that her students' post-colonial argumentative essays could be adjusted to assess for some of the skills the team discussed. One teacher shared that as a result of the team meeting, she is better prepared to embed the AP skills into her assessments.

- Review of team meeting minutes across grades and content areas reveals a consistent practice of sharing strategies and curriculum development to support student learning. One teacher reported that in the ELA department, they developed common rubrics to use across grades. After reviewing student work, the math team determined that students struggled with constructed responses. The team decided to create a template and teach students to annotate math word problems to support students' writing complete explanations in their constructed responses.

- Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students on whom they are focused. The grade 12 team identified twenty-two students who are at-risk based on Regents' scores or credit accumulation. The team decided to use an online grade book and have students determine in which classes they could improve based on their current grades. Students were then encouraged to attend peer-peer tutoring to improve in their identified areas. At the end of the inquiry cycle, the team reviewed students' grades to assess if progress had been made. The grade-six team identified fifteen students who were failing their math and ELA classes as their target group. Students in this group worked on vocabulary and single-digit multiplication. Approximately two-thirds of the students demonstrated progress in multiplication. The team concluded that this type of remediation requires more time and, therefore, they will change their inquiry focus for the next cycle.