



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Aspirations Diploma Plus

High School 646

**1495 Herkimer Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Shermila Bharat

**Date of review: February 12, 2015
Lead Reviewer: LaShawn Robinson**

The School Context

Aspirations Diploma Plus is a transfer high school with 220 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 74% Black, 20% Hispanic, 3% American Indian or Alaskan, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 13% Special Education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 63.4%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Developing
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school leader communicates high expectation for teachers, students, and families through frequent observations and the modeling of effective practices. In addition, the school leaders provide targeted support to students, and conduct frequent family outreach.

Impact

The school leader's expectations, along with the supports provided to reach these expectations are helping to improve student outcomes and preparing students for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal begins the school year by reviewing the City-wide instructional expectations and Danielson Framework. These expectations are embedded in planning documents across subjects. Teachers receive instructional support from Teaching Matter and school leaders that is captured in ongoing written feedback. Moreover, the assistant principals model lessons to share best practices with teachers and model expected instructional strategies
- The school college advisor works with students and families to support them with the college process. Students are afforded the opportunity to go on college trips so that they are able to make transitional plans for the future. Parents stated that the school conducts college trips and offers other incentives to reengage students, as well as additional academic supports through the after school and Saturday programs. They stated that these supports are helping students to get back on track to prepare for them for college. A parent stated, "They make my children feel that they will and can succeed." The school currently offers a college and career after school program in collaboration with the learning to work coordinator. Additionally, they utilize the Road Trip Nation as part of the advisory curriculum. Teachers described that the school's emphasis in writing, note taking, and exposing students to high level text such as Shakespeare is helping to better prepare students for college.
- The school consistently communicates with parents to provide academic updates and involve them with the students' academic progress and school related activities. The Parent Coordinator sends home monthly newsletters informing parents of upcoming events, workshops, and student achievements. Additionally, the school utilizes Jupiter Grades so that parents and students can access academic data daily and keep track of students' academic progress.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching strategies do not consistently include targeted instructional supports to engage all learners in rigorous tasks and high-level discussions.

Impact

Although classroom activities provide multiple entry points, the instructional focus that promotes student thinking and discussion is developing, students are not consistently engaged in appropriately challenging tasks that promote increase in student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader described that the instructional focus of the school is that teachers will provide higher order questioning and multiple points of access for students to improve their development of literacy and problem solving skills. The school leaders articulated that the school is focused on building coherence across the curriculum with an emphasis on discussion, questioning, reading, writing, and self-assessment across content areas. Although these practices are emerging across classrooms, they were not consistently observed in classrooms visited. For instance, in the science classroom visited, students were engaged in a lively discussion based upon the following prompt: “Can we live in this world without the help of DNA?” Students utilized accountable talk practices, such as building upon one another’s thinking, agreeing and disagreeing, student to student questioning, and articulating their understanding of DNA. While this classroom yielded high levels of student thinking and discussion, evidence of student discussion is limited across the school community, thereby limiting opportunities for students to articulate their thinking.
- Teachers utilize the workshop model across classrooms, however, 'wrap ups' or lesson summarizations were not present in the Earth science and English class visited towards the end of the period. Additionally, the arrow of recitation was teacher to student. Writing observed in classes was in the form of short responses to questions or prompts. Posted student work across classrooms featured writing, particularly in English and History, where students completed essays aligned to Regents expectations and received feedback using rubrics. The school leader has also worked to provide students support by assigning two integrated co-teachers to push into classes and one of the teachers serve as a special education support service teacher.
- The principal has made a conscious decision to address the needs of the English Language Learners. Currently an ELA teacher who is pursuing ESL certification is servicing student ESL needs. This teacher is currently tracking the growth and development of the students and uses the data that he gathers to make informed decisions about how to better support the English learners.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and academic tasks are refined using student work and Regents data in order to provide appropriate entry points to all students.

Impact

Curriculum maps and lessons across content areas include Common Core aligned objectives, essential questions and culminating tasks that support the development of higher order thinking skills..

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers described that curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and summative and formative assessments. The school leaders and coaches from Teaching Matter provide curriculum development support and feedback to teachers so that they are able to develop instructional tasks that are intended to provide multiple entry points and scaffolds and challenge students to think critically. Units of study are developed using UBD, this way, the lesson and tasks are able to reflect continuity in terms of the lesson objective being covered. Furthermore, Regent exam item analysis is used to refine the scope and Sequence and identify instructional gaps. Teachers describe that their planning follow the Common Core Standards, which is helping them to better focus on college and career readiness.
- The school leader described that tasks are designed and refined as teachers continually gather data in order to address the levels of the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) based on student current performance. This way, teachers are able to meet the needs of students at their current level and are able to move them along the continuum to mastery. Additionally, teachers are able to develop learning centers for tasks and activities that students can “pull-out” for additional support in task specific Common Core Learning Standards skills and abilities to “re-engage” in the task or activity. Moreover, teachers meet the needs of students on a daily basis. In the integrated co-teaching classrooms, teachers plan and discuss the division of labor to best address the whole child thus scaffolding the learning for students with disabilities and English language learners.
- As a result of the work on curriculum development and supports available, current units of study are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and citywide instructional expectations across all content areas. In addition, the school leader described that they have noticed gains in four of the five Regents exams. Furthermore, students demonstrate improvements in their performance based assessment tasks, particularly around making claims and counterclaims. Student work and tasks displayed in the rooms were aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress. Teachers use rubrics aligned to the school curricula to provide students with actionable feedback.

Impact

Current assessment practices, particularly formative and summative practices are not yet fully aligned; thus limiting student growth on summative assessments.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader shared that teachers align assessments with content curricula and utilize a common grading policy and rubrics to provide consistent feedback to students. The use of a common grading policy and rubrics were evident across the school community. Student work with teacher feedback was posted throughout the school community.
- Teachers were observed checking for understanding through conferencing, asking questions, and canvassing the classroom. In one out of the seven classrooms visited, a teacher was charting student progress. However, these practices were inconsistent across classrooms and teachers were not observed making instructional adjustments based on in-classroom assessment of student performance. For instance, during a math lesson, students appear to struggle with the questions and mathematical concepts being reviewed, but the teacher continued the lesson with minimal intervention.
- Parents use Jupiter grades to track and monitor their child's progress in the school. School leaders hold scholarship review meetings with teachers to track and monitor pass rates in the school community. The school has recently begun the process of programming students based on remediation. In addition, baseline assessments are administered at the beginning of the year. As a result of these assessments, students are now working on claims, counter claims and academic vocabulary across content areas. While these practices are used across classrooms, they are emerging in improving student achievement outcomes for course pass rates and summative assessments (Regents). Therefore, the practices have not yet resulted in substantial increases in Regents and course pass rates.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Most teachers are currently engaged in structured professional collaborations to review student work and inform instructional practice.

Impact

Professional collaborations are beginning to improve teacher practice by allowing teachers to share best practices and are starting to impact student learning outcomes for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers were provided opportunities to select how they would like to utilize their “other professional work” time to help students towards mastery. Nine out of sixteen teachers selected student inquiry, eleven out of sixteen selected department meetings and two teachers opted out of the teaming structure. There was limited evidence of how the teacher teams are structured to support the school goals and instructional focus. Teachers meet in department teams and inquiry teams to improve teacher practice and increase student achievement outcomes. While teachers meet in teams 1-2 times per month, and there is evidence of an increase in student achievement as a result of the work of the team, the work of the teacher teams is currently impacting a limited number of students. Currently the inquiry team has served three out of the two hundred and twenty students in the school this academic year, thus limiting the opportunity to build teacher capacity and the opportunity to leverage resources to meet the needs of a larger number of students.
- During a teacher meeting observed, teachers discussed strategies to support a student with an individualized education plan. Strategies shared ranged from providing graphic organizers to allowing the students to utilize technology in the classroom. The principal and the teachers indicated that the team was successful in the previous term by transitioning two scholars with individualized education plans from failing all classes to passing four out of six classes for one student and six out of six classes for the other.
- Teachers described that as part of their inquiry work, they target students with disabilities to prevent them from falling through the cracks. They started out with a list of students that they have in common and who have demonstrated that they need more support. After reviewing and looking at the data, they then went over what they all noticed have worked for some of these students. The team discovered that one student needed technology and they provided opportunities for this student to type her responses in class. She is now passing all classes in comparison with the past where she was failing all courses. Another student was failing because she needed glasses. She was also tested for dyslexia. As a result of the work of the team, she went from failing everything to passing four out of six classes. Additionally, this student will be a part of the Wilson reading intervention program that the school is currently working to implement as an additional supplemental service for struggling readers.