



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

New Directions Secondary School

Secondary School X350

**240 East 172nd Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: James Waslawski

**Date of review: March 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Leticia Rodriguez-Rosario**

The School Context

New Directions is a secondary school with 154 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 30% Black, 68% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 32% English language learners and 36% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 68.2%.

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	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all stakeholders and provide supports for their success in meeting the expectations. The expectations are aligned to teacher development goals for all staff and college and career readiness goals for all students.

Impact

The school environment incorporates multiple supports and structures aligned to the goal of supporting disenfranchised students towards meeting learning standards. The school's high expectations for learning are shared with all stakeholders who work collaboratively with each other to ensure that all expectations are met.

Supporting Evidence

- All stakeholders including the school community partner, Wediko, work together towards the expectation that the entire population comprised solely of overaged transfer students have the opportunity to get back on track towards graduating from high school and moving beyond that. In collaboration with the school, Wediko staff and personnel visit families to strengthen their understanding of how they can help their children make progress towards expectations for college and career readiness and support the school in improving student attendance. There are also four assemblies held in the school auditorium to communicate school goals and expectations toward college and career readiness for all students.
- Staff expectations are messaged through weekly Staff Reminder Bulletins and instructional expectations are further conveyed through professional development and feedback from the observation cycle that is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, a teacher received the following feedback during an observation cycle: "Be consistent with classroom expectations. For example, when students leave seats without permission address the misbehavior every time. How about assigning group leaders? How about the use of incentives such as raffle tickets / PBIS bucks?" Another teacher received the following feedback: "In regards to checking for understanding during class work time, endeavor to begin to track students so that you can pinpoint your students who are not volunteering to respond to the lesson. Maybe finding other ways to involve them in the assessment such as the idea of playing cards or Popsicle sticks could be helpful".
- High expectations for students are conveyed through daily advisory sessions held by Wediko staff, teachers and administrators. There are one to one sessions, team-building activities, lessons in social skills, emotion regulation practice, and executive functioning practice that support students in the attainment of behaviors that align to school goals and learning targets for all students.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

The school is in the process of using student work and data to align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and to the instructional shifts. Curriculum does not provide access points for all learners including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

Curricula do not consistently provide students with Common Core Learning aligned tasks that promote college and career readiness. Supports needed for all learners to have full access to curricula with rigorous tasks are not clearly evident in instructional plans reviewed.

Supporting Evidence

- Consultants from Eskolta LLC and Re-design NYC are working with teacher teams to align units of study to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. As per the principal, “We are still developing this process in our school and our culminating tasks continue to improve in their complexity and rigor.”
- Most lesson plans reviewed do not consistently indicate how learning is adapted to meet the needs of all learners, especially English Language Learners or students with disabilities. For example, in many lessons students were grouped based on where they were in the writing process, with little or no indication as to how they would be supported to meet the task.
- Lessons reviewed illustrated an inconsistency in the rigor, especially in the area of questioning. For example, in a math plan reviewed the questions read as follows, “Why would we want to use this style?” “How many lines does it take to make an O, a W, a D?” “Why is it easier on grid paper?” By contrast, in another plan reviewed, questions were of a more cognitive challenge. For example, “Will we have solved the problem once we solve for x?” “How will we know we arrived at the correct answer?” “Can you describe a scenario where this strategy would not work when working with lines?”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching strategies inconsistently engage students in discussions with peer to peer interactions across lessons. Discussions that evoke higher order thinking and result in high quality student work were not evident across classrooms.

Impact

Inconsistent teaching practices result in uneven student engagement in high level discussions and missed opportunities to consistently expose all students to tasks that promote critical thinking across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- Although, some teachers are beginning to engage students using questioning, there are missed opportunities to engage students in discussions. For example, in an eighth grade literacy class students were given the poem, “Abandoned Farmhouse” by Ted Kooser and the teacher stated, “I am thinking about the genre; How can I determine the genre?” Three students responded to the question. At one point a student responded to another student but the teacher interceded and what could have been a lively discussion ceased. The teacher then asked, “Are these paragraphs? Do you agree it is a short story? What is at the beginning of a short story?” These questions did not challenge students to engage deeply with the text.
- In some rooms instruction was teacher centered and did not promote critical thinking. For example, in a math class, the teacher introduced the Laws of Exponents one by one on the board. The teacher did not provide students with an opportunity to actively engage with any of the laws. Students simply copied them as the teacher wrote them. There was also little to no interaction between the teacher and the students and among students.
- In a sixth grade science lesson about food webs, after a review of the topic the teacher provided the students a sheet with questions that the students then discussed in groups. The students answered the questions easily (i.e. “What do you think will happen to the population of the frog if we remove the snakes from the food web?”), illustrating a missed opportunity to engage them in higher order thinking and discussion through more in depth questioning such as, “What is the implication of these webs in relation to the development/destruction of the rainforests?” Also, there was no evidence that the work was differentiated to ensure access for all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Findings

Although the school uses various assessments to gather data on student performance, there is limited evidence of the sharing of effective feedback on student work. The school is beginning to use common assessments to inform adjustments to teacher practice and curricula.

Impact

Data from assessments is not consistently being shared and used strategically to improve student achievement across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is in the process of creating assessments for all content areas and aligning assessments to the curricula. The school in collaboration with Eskolta has developed periodic assessments that are administered three times a year with the data being used to monitor student progress. The scores are illustrated in bar graphs by grade and via an item analysis sheet. However, there is limited evidence in teacher team agendas and lesson plans as to how this information is used to adjust curriculum or inform instruction.
- Across classrooms teacher feedback seen on some students' work does not inform the students' next steps across grades and content areas. For example, on a science activity on microscope use, the teacher's feedback to students read, "Great job with the detail." "What do you think these dots and lines are?" In some writing pieces comments were written in the margin. However, most did not reflect applications of the content and concepts embedded in a rubric or checklist, when there was one present.
- I-Ready assessments are conducted two to three periods per week in English language arts and math and in the School Self Evaluation document, the principal writes, "Student performance on NY I-Ready assessments has influenced target areas for remediation." However, in the unit/ lesson plans reviewed there was no evidence of how information from these assessments informs adjustments that impact student learning. A review of school documents showed no specific grouping or skill work for students identified.

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

All teachers are involved in teacher teams that are working on aligning their work to the Common Core Learning Standards and school goals. The teams are in the beginning stages of using data and student work to inform and improve teacher practice.

Impact

Although teachers stated that participation in teams has improved their understanding of their work, teacher team work is yet to have significant impact on teacher practice and student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- A teacher team focused on curriculum development meets bi-weekly to continue the curriculum design process. Team members are developing rubrics and assessments that support teachers in the planning of lesson sequences. They review student work and current student assessments to inform this work. A Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) which includes Wediko staff, administration, guidance personnel and various content teachers, meets to share strategies to support student attendance and engagement in academic work.
- During the Curricular Development Team meeting, the teachers, with the support of an Eskolta consultant, worked on the development of authentic tasks aligned to the Common Core Standards and the instructional shifts. However, there was limited discussion on how instructional plans would be modified to ensure progress towards goals for groups of students, such as English Language Learners or students with disabilities.
- Department teams meet at least once a week and are currently led by administrators due to the newness of the teaching staff. The focus of these teams is looking closely at current units of study. They meet with coaches and work on the implementation of strategies learned during professional development, and on developing structures to increase cohesion across classrooms. Teachers shared that participation in teams is improving their understanding of their work. However, observations of teacher practice and documents reviewed during the Quality Review showed limited evidence of positive impact of teacher team collaborations on teacher development and student progress.