



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**Pelham Academy of Academic and
Community Engagement**

Middle School X468

**2441 Wallace Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Anthony Rivera

**Date of review: January 12, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

The Pelham Academy of Academic and Community Engagement is a middle school with 337 students in grades 6-8. The school population comprises 21% Black, 61% Hispanic, 9% White, 7% Asian, and 2% other students. The student body includes 10% English language learners (ELLs) and 20% students with disabilities (SWD). Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92%.

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	Well Developed
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	Proficient
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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Common assessments are used to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subjects. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

All students, including ELLs and SWDs, demonstrate increased mastery. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- “The large majority of classes use a standard rubric and the assessment criteria are standardized,” said Principal Rivera. “We’re using common assessments and our scope and sequence is the same across the school so conversations teachers have with each other are relevant. Our grading policy is rooted in assessment as evidenced by student work products. In some cases, such as in lab reports, we incorporated elements from the MoSL (Measures of Student Learning) rubric.” A teacher added: “We use the *Performance Series*[™], which is a citywide measure that tells the story of where our children are and where they need to be. We plan common assessments together with the same end goal.” A math journal rubric developed by teachers has three components—work that shows understanding and precision (up to 50 points), use of grade-appropriate math vocabulary (up to 15 points), and explanation of conceptual ideas (up to 35 points).
- Student mastery data is tracked for each module and unit assessment on reports that highlights by standard those student scores that fall below 64 (red), scores from 65 to 79 (yellow), and scores above 80 (green). Lexile levels are used to track students' reading comprehension and to connect students with text at the appropriate level of challenge. Teachers and administrators have identified power standards, which are a subset of learning standards that they have determined to be high priority. ELLs and SWDs are held to the same standards. Student progress reports are provided to families at the mid-point in each quarter. Families also have access to *Pupil Path* (DataCation), an online portal where students and parents can access grades and assignments. Students monitor their own portfolio entries using a form entitled “Portfolio Data Tracker.” On this form, students enter the dates of the “quick writes” in English language arts, specify what they did well, describe next steps, and grade the entry. The results of unit assessments are also entered and notations are made by the student if the work is displayed on the bulletin board. “
- “We’ve worked to identify gaps in the curriculum with our instructional practices and with the outcomes,” said Principal Rivera. “The one gap we’ve identified is a disconnect in the assessments for *Expeditionary Learning* and the summative assessments that kids take in April. We knew we had to supplement *Expeditionary Learning* with *iReady*[®] (Curriculum Associates) diagnostics. This is our second month of using it and we’re getting data captured similar to the state test.”

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by Danielson's Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula.

Impact

Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs based on the results of the common assessments. Students are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- "The Danielson Framework has provided us with a common language to talk about teaching and learning, which was a huge struggle before," said Principal Rivera. "It enables us to capture good evidence about where teachers are with their practice. Before the process was very anecdotal and now it's grounded in data. We've now been retrained to look objectively at practice and to compare it with this tool." A teacher stated, "The emphasis before was on right or wrong. Now, we use a Turn and Talk strategy so students share their thinking."
- "Our instructional focus is about making good decisions about data to support instructional decisions and student achievement," said Principal Rivera. "This means being accountable for what we do and how we do it, such as modifying lesson plans for multiple entry points. We've seen a huge shift, with more station work, scaffolded text and graphic organizers to make the learning more meaningful." In a seventh-grade math class focused on proportional relationships to solve multistep ratio and percent problems, students use guiding questions and graphic organizers as they rotate among stations for calculating discounts, sale prices, original prices, taxes and tips. "One of the pushes we've made this year is strategic grouping of students where kids are working with their peers for reasons that they are clear on," said Principal Rivera. Within this math lesson plan were modifications for both individual students to address such needs as handwriting, attention, and language barriers. "We continued our work in looking at the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework at the end of last year and have provided professional development opportunities on multiple entry points," said Principal Rivera. A summer workshop series with Ken Westerman of GoldMansour & Rutherford was focused on the needs of diverse learners, with ongoing coaching of co-teachers into the school year.
- Socratic seminar is used by teachers as a framework for discussion and respectful group interaction. Seven groups of eighth-grade students in an English language arts (ELA) Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class engaged in differentiated tasks related to an essay entitled "The Golden Rule." Students in groups 1 & 2 were tasked with identifying the connection among different quotes on sentence strips, such as a quote by Dr. Louise Hart: "The golden rule of parenting is do unto your children as you wish your parents had done unto you!" Students in groups 3 & 4 read the essay and discussed evidence that suggested what the Golden Rule is and how it applies to a person's everyday life. Students in groups 5, 6, & 7 watched a video clip about the Golden Rule, and discussed whether the Golden Rule was something that could be applied in business and politics.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in the school's curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades.

Impact

There is coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students. All learners, including ELLs and SWDs, must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- For English language arts (ELA), the school uses *Expeditionary Learning* and *Connected Mathematics Project-3* (CMP3) is used for mathematics. “Last year we used CMP3 like a bible,” said a math teacher. Following an end of year data analysis, teachers concluded that CMP3 “...has high expectations but doesn’t do a good job in giving kids practice for the state test.” “Generally kids come in lacking foundation skills,” said Principal Rivera. “Having co-teachers in the classroom has been a huge help, but it wasn’t enough. We don’t just want skill...we want embedded skill and discovery.”
- “We used an Understanding by Design (UBD) template to unpack the curriculum packages and have been mindful about structuring prompts and questions that will push students to be successful,” said Principal Rivera. “Instructional shifts are easiest to see because they’re embedded in the performance tasks. The performance task rubric forced our teachers to ground their practice in those shifts. Science and social studies have begun to use the UBD template. In years past, these content areas were more content driven and now they’re more process driven, scientific thinking and writing...historical thinking and writing.”
- The lesson plan for a self-contained special education ELA class requires students to discuss the relationship between four texts, including Katherine Patterson’s *Lyddie*, Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, and two news articles—one about children getting sick working on American tobacco farms (Associated Press) and the other about Bangladeshi women who endure hardship and freedom in sewing clothes. “Teachers are drawing kids back to the text and many kids are drawing their answers from the text,” said Principal Rivera. “Yet some kids are still having difficulty citing solid evidence from the text.” Teachers shared that they focused on integrating writing into every class and had professional development on the *Collins Writing Program*. The school has clinic periods twice each week, where teachers can focus on knowing students and their learning styles. Teachers use the *Ready*® *New York* and *iReady*® programs during these periods.
- The school uses the Tri-State Rubric (<https://www.engageny.org/resource/tri-state-quality-review-rubric-and-rating-process>) to evaluate the quality of the lessons and units intended to address the Common Core Standards. “We use Google Docs throughout the school as our primary mode of communication and the vessel in which all of our documentation and work is stored,” said Principal Rivera. “We record the work that we do and the curricular modifications that we make, so teachers have an opportunity to be reflective through what we know now. We’ve sought to streamline that process so it’s more predictable and manageable...we don’t want changes and innovation done in isolation.”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide quality training to help meet these expectations. Expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness are effectively communicated to families.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations exists among staff and families in support of college and career readiness expectations for students.

Supporting Evidence

- “High expectations starts with our faculty handbook,” said Principal Rivera. “We establish for them how professionalism is defined. We have a straightforward conversation with them about what is and is not acceptable in this building. For the most part, the large majority of our teachers conform to it. Others will learn to conform or leave.” The school has a plan for supporting new and transitioning teachers to the school’s expectations that includes lesson planning, productivity during prep periods, and trusting their instincts. Teachers mentioned professional development they received on the Frayer Model, a graphic organizer used for word analysis and vocabulary building. They have also read articles about checking for understanding and the book, *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov, a compilation of effective teaching techniques.
- Students have an opportunity to achieve Honor Roll status during each marking period and to be a part of the school’s chapter of the National Junior Honor Society. As students participate in Socratic Seminar in various classes, they engage in activities that promote personal responsibility, self-directed learning, public speaking, student-to-student questioning and other dignified and respectful group interactions. In December, the school dedicated two full days of classroom visits by the school’s teachers focused on college and career. Teachers spoke about their experiences with college applications, alma mater attendance, and subsequent career pursuits. A parent of a sixth grader stated: “My daughter already knows what college she wants to go to. They helped me to visualize what your kids would be doing. At the rate my daughter is going, she could get into any high school.”
- “Families’ understanding of the Common Core is still evolving,” said Principal Rivera. “Parents understand that the lay of the land has shifted and kids are expected to do more at an earlier age.” Parents commented: “The Common Core is confusing...it teaches you how to take the test, not necessarily about content. It should have begun in Pre-Kindergarten...it’s unfair that they drop it on sixth graders. Nonetheless, Pelham is doing well. I’ve had to go online to learn it myself.” “The Pelham Family Express” is the school’s newsletter, which acts as the primary vehicle for communicating with parents about the learning taking place in the school. In the January 7th newsletter issue, topics addressed include but are not limited to student high school articulation, updates student cell phone use, reflections on the winter showcase choral performance, and current and upcoming curricular modules and assessments. “We also provide them with tips for how to help their child,” said Principal Rivera. Parents said it would be even better if more parents were getting involved, as “...it’s always the same parents.” Principal Rivera responded: “We’ve also been pushing the idea around of student-led parent-teacher conferences because that’s a great example.” Finally, parents talked about how Principal Rivera, “...knows every child by their name. He’s more like a friend to our kids.”

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Distributed leadership enables collaborative teacher teams to undertake systematic analyses of key elements of teacher work, including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work.

Impact

There have been shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. There is effective teacher leadership with teachers playing an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has invested in professional development support for teachers from Teaching Matters (www.teachingmatters.org) and Metamorphosis Teaching Learning Communities (www.metatlcinc.com). “One of the instructional coaches from Teaching Matters brought in some resources to use that break down the critical attributes of teaching and identifies where teachers are in their practice,” said Principal Rivera.
- During a math Professional Learning Team (PLT) meeting, participants engaged in rating a videotaped lesson using Danielson’s Framework, Domain 1(e)—Designing Coherent Instruction. “When thinking about our teachers and pushing their drive to be content specialists, one of the things we’ve piloted this year is a lesson study protocol,” said Principal Rivera. Other PLT meetings have focused on backwards design, unit planning, benchmark exams, and student work. “Using the lesson study protocol, grade levels come together to identify a standard they want to teach, discuss the lesson, videotape it, and receive feedback from their colleagues,” said a teacher. The school has just completed their first round of intervisitations. Teachers used a self-assessment questionnaire on ARIS (Achievement Reporting and Innovation System) to document their learning.
- We (administrators) are pretty consistent in attending these meetings,” said Principal Rivera. “We start our meetings with a check-in on our previous meeting and the work engaged in over the week. We work with our teachers to develop the agenda, and we’ve used Google Docs to share documents for the past two years. This work has strengthened teacher practice by adding to their instructional repertoire. Teachers are exposed to different ways of thinking and doing.”