Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Aspirations Diploma Plus High School

High school 23K646

1495 Herkimer St.
Brooklyn
NY 11233

Principal: Sherma Fleming

Dates of Review:
March 9, 2017 - March 10, 2017

Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth

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

Aspirations Diploma Plus High School serves students in grade 9 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

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school...	Area	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 Finding**	**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	**Area of 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 Finding**	**Developing**

School Quality Ratings continued

School Culture

To what extent does the school...	Area	Rating
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults	**Area of Celebration**	**Proficient**
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**

Systems for Improvement

To what extent does the school...	Area	Rating
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	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**
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	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**
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	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	**Additional Finding**	**Developing**
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	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**

Quality Indicator:	1.4 Positive Learning Environment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Structures are in place to maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes created through the Driven to Reach Every Academic Milestone initiative. Professional development is aligned to family outreach, and student learning experiences to ensure progress toward learning goals.

Impact

As a result of this positive culture, students are well known by at least one adult who helps coordinate attendance, social-emotional learning programs, and guidance advisement supports that address student academic and personal needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Increased attendance is a primary goal of the school leadership with an emphasis on collaboration with staff, students, and their families. Through a variety of support structures, including ongoing attention to their attendance and credit accumulation, students are kept up to date regarding their progress towards graduation. Daily phone calls, tracker sheets with individual records including tardiness data, and home visits keep families and students aware of their attendance patterns.

- Individual counseling sessions are conducted for many students to ensure their academic, and personal growth. A review of several excerpts from a guidance counselor's caseload indicate meeting with students to increase their trimester average by completing work and receiving tutoring. Parental letters sent home inform parents of the status of classes passed or failed, academic achievement expectations, and request for a parent meeting. Several students stated the guidance counselor provides information regarding what they may emotionally experience after graduation and offer sources for information to help them become enrolled in post-high school education or the military.

- The school leadership was creative in providing additional programming and support so all students could achieve academic success. The philosophy they adopted centers on the concept that students are driven to reach every academic milestone (DREAM) through high expectations. Opportunities for students to make their DREAM a reality include daily lunchtime and after school programs for young men and women. Several of the programs include DREAM Studio, Aspire for Greatness Dance & Step, Aspiring Girl's & Young Men's Initiative, and Leaders' Forum. The students in the DREAM studio have recently written and recorded four song tracks, several poems, and disc jockeyed the school holiday party. The Aspire for Greatness Dance & Step group recently performed at an African American Day Parade in Harlem. Students unanimously report the greatest impact of the DREAM factory is the interaction it provides in fostering a positive vibe, understanding of one another, and building their confidence and trust as a family.

- Professional development and family outreach are aligned with the vision of promoting effective academic and personal behaviors for all members of the school community. For example, a math teacher was quick to note the additional support he was provided when he began creating a student-centered classroom. Similarly, parents who were challenged with helping their child prepare for college, including enrollment and applications, voiced the strong support they receive and the valuable workshops that are offered by the school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to engage students, incorporate the instructional shifts, and allow for students to engage in increased peer-to-peer discussions. Teaching strategies across classes inconsistently provide scaffolds and resources for most students.

Impact

The uneven entry points and limited experiences for student engagement result in work products that reflect inconsistent levels of participation and higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, instruction reflected uneven opportunities for students to engage in tasks based on the core beliefs communicated by the school leadership. In one English Language Arts (ELA) class, with many English Language Learners (ELL), grouping and pacing was suitable for the lesson and fostered students intellectual engagement. A discussion about literary voice and author's individual style of writing required students to make connections between their social life and the American values of peace, freedom, equality, and justice. Students played an important role in keeping the conversation going, while appropriately challenging points of view given by other groups. The teachers observed and recorded findings from the students' interactions and posed critical questioning extensions. However, across most classes, groupings and structures that permitted students to take the initiative and contribute to the exploration of important content were not evident.

- The vast majority of classes, students read and annotated the text, however, few multiple entry points, scaffolds, graphic organizers, or extensions were provided to support student's ability to further engage in the assignment. For example, during a science lesson, students were instructed to independently read from the textbook and answer fill-in questions. All students were expected to complete the same six station tasks by writing the missing words in their notebook thus creating a list of numbered terms disconnected from any contextual understanding. Similarly, in a social studies lesson, students were provided a series of documents to develop responses to questions posed regarding the annexation of Texas by the United States. Neither scaffolds nor clear structures were provided to students to aide in the development of their reasoning, limiting effective conclusions. Prior to the end of the period, the teacher hastily communicated that the task was to be completed over the weekend further reducing the ability for students to produce a quality work product.

- During an ELA lesson addressing the dehumanization of individuals and the atrocities referenced in *Night* by Elie Wiesel, a majority of students were passive listeners due to the limited opportunities for reflection and discussion. Students in a math class were asked many procedural questions as the teacher demonstrated how to solve a factor trinomial. Students contributed to the process by shouting out one-word suggestions or confirmations as the teacher proceeded through the solution.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

School leaders and staff ensure curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts with purposeful decisions emphasizing rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills.

Impact

This effective curricula alignment produces coherence and the promotion of college and career readiness skills, which are embedded into instructional planning documents for all students. Performance tasks require high levels of thinking and student explanations.

Supporting Evidence

- In curricula documents integration of the instructional shifts in ELA is emphasized, specifically, engaging students in evidence based conversations, which address the text. In a lesson written by a special education teacher the task requires students to read a primary source document and develop an understanding of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Using Individual copies of the document student pairs develop questions based on their reading.

- A science unit plan on reproduction and development includes the reading and writing of Common Core Learning Standards with students citing specific textual evidence to support the analysis of science and other technical texts underscoring the importance of providing precise details of explanations or descriptions. A summative assessment performance task included within the unit provides for students to write a diary describing what happens in their life as they age. Subsequent summative assessments in the same unit require students to complete an explanatory writing piece on the finches of the Galapagos Islands.

- Academic vocabulary is an essential focus in all lesson-planning documents and supports the emphasis of higher-order thinking across grades. A Spanish lesson plan includes the exposure and understanding of language (vocabulary) through a variety of verbal and written activities. A chemistry lesson addresses relevant physical science concepts and challenges students to use scientific explanations in their comparing and contrasting the electronegativity values of elements in the periodic table.

- Rigorous habits are evident in curricula tasks assigned to students found throughout unit plans, student portfolios, and bulletin boards posted throughout the building. Rubrics aligned with the New York State Regent's examinations are used to establish criteria on a variety of assignments across content areas. Additionally, tasks are often planned for students to create Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* level questions as part of their learning.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings

Although rubrics are commonly referenced as a tool during assessment practices, they are loosely aligned to the feedback provided students. Teachers' assessment practices unevenly reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding during instruction.

Impact

Assessment practices, including the effective use of rubrics, are used in a limited capacity, thus diminishing the feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. As such, effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs inconsistently take place across classes.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics are used in many classes with a variety of assignments. However, students are limited in their ability to explain the role rubrics play in providing feedback to advance their achievement. Students shared several assignments with feedback and explained the teacher includes areas for improvement to submit for an increased grade. They are provided opportunities to improve their work during extra-help sessions during and after school. Evidence of alignment of the written feedback and the rubric ratings which students use to make revisions is not apparent. Most students explained that the teacher usually provides immediate verbal one-on-one support that more explicitly defines the adjustments regarding areas to improve upon.

- Most teachers check students' understanding by asking questions and working with small groups of students. Yet, they do not respond effectively to their assessments. For example, a teacher directed students to engage in a task independently, or as a small group, and asked, "Are you with me?" prior to encouraging them to get started. Although clarification or more direction was necessary for a majority of students in the classes visited, teachers often leave students to struggle with the task. In many classes the instruction moved forward even though the students did not understand the task. For example, in a Spanish class, students continuously made errors conjugating verbs despite the teacher's attempt to consistently reiterate the pronunciation and point to the proper phrasing as it was written on the board.

- Several opportunities for students to peer assess and use checklists were evident across classes. For example, during a chemistry lesson, students were asked to use a checklist and swap their charts with another student. The teacher simultaneously walked around and asked probing questions to ensure content knowledge was understood and they were on task. Although other samples of checklists and peer editing tools were provided, use of them was limited. Furthermore, when checklists were provided, they did not address the qualitative aspects of the task focusing only on the intended criteria. Checking for depth or accuracy was not included.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

School leaders consistently express high expectations regarding professionalism, school climate, and classroom pedagogy to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture of learning that consistently articulates high expectations for all students.

Impact

School leaders have established systems of training to support accountability regarding high expectations for teachers. Teachers meet regularly and provide ongoing, detailed feedback to students ensuring their readiness for college or career beyond high school.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership believes the best way to communicate expectations is by building a relationship and focusing on those goals that are equally valued. Staff is consistently offered suggestions and supportive training to improve pedagogy that addresses preparing students for life after graduation. For example, a primary expectation is to embed college and career skills with the instructional shifts. Teachers who struggled with implementing text-based articles, or developing experiences for increasing student engagement, were provided professional development addressing these practices. Fellow teachers who showed strength in these areas provided intervisitations and modeled for their colleagues. The assistant principal facilitates additional professional development through one-on-one meetings with the teachers and provides post-observation scripts of recommended strategies. High expectations are focused upon during formal professional development days in alignment with the staff handbook and provide opportunities for teachers to embrace the DREAM.

- Various consultants offer additional professional development and training. Connected with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, professional conferences address effective use of Webb's Depth of Knowledge questioning techniques, close reading strategies, annotation tools, and planning rigorous tasks. The culture for learning is supportive and risk free. Regular emails are sent from the school principal to staff intended to provide a "pick-me-up positive quote to help you start your day."

- Case conferences are held weekly with support staff and families. Appropriate interventions to support students are put into place so the students' needs will be met and are prepared for post high school life. Interventions include evaluating the student's cognitive abilities, diagnosing and prescribing potential solutions to support writing skills, and providing appropriate resources for daily learning

- Students have overwhelmingly benefitted from peer leadership opportunities. Through mentorships effective guidance and advisement interventions take place, similar to supports provided by professionals in the work place. Students especially value the priority awarded to peer leadership and the structures that give all new students ongoing and detailed feedback.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development	Rating:	Developing

Findings

Teachers are engaged in weekly professional collaborations. Credit accumulation data and social-emotional anecdotal information is being used as the basis for inquiry which is emerging schoolwide.

Impact

Teacher teams are attempting to improve their instructional capacity by focusing on student achievement through inquiry teams, although results do not yet demonstrate progress towards improvement for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- A variety of teams exist and meet regularly to engage in professional collaborations to support the values and goals defined by the school's mission and vision. However, it is not clear how some teams, specifically content teams, are improving instruction using an inquiry approach. Structures are in place for teams to use a protocol when discussing specific "pushable" students; those identified as just below the graduation criteria. An instructional team primarily addressed the social and emotional well-being of two students. Many anecdotal statements were offered as areas of concern although it was not clear how the strategies discussed would impact the students' learning. At the conclusion of the meeting, there was a lack of explicit next steps. A review of agendas and minutes from several other teams highlight an absence of concrete solutions being reached on the topics discussed.

- Teacher teams meet weekly during common planning time to look at student work and the most recent assessment data. Cohesive strategies to address achievement gaps and instructional deficiencies do not appear to be clearly formulated. Several teachers did share the impact meeting together has had on their instructional delivery. For example, an ELA teacher noted he now provides a particular student more individual attention following the information related to his success in other classes shared by team members. Similarly, another teacher noted how he has become more empathetic and patient since engaging in these discussions.

- Teachers reported collaboration affords them the opportunity to build better relationships with students and staff because they share professional and personal experiences resulting in driving student achievement forward. Not all staff could clearly identify strategies that specifically improved their teacher practice, but they did report that the practice of identifying deficiencies, especially with their coaches, is contributing to improved teaching that has led to academic growth for their students.