Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Parkside Preparatory Academy

Middle School K002

655 Parkside Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11226

Principal: Adrienne Spencer

Date of review: January 26, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman

The School Context

Parkside Preparatory Academy is a middle school with 476 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 81% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.1%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**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	**Additional Findings**	**Proficient**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Well Developed**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

The principal consistently holds all teachers to high expectations and puts structures in place to ensure they meet them. School leaders and teachers communicate high expectations to families and students connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Teachers hold themselves accountable for meeting the high expectations set forth by school leaders. The school leaders and teachers successfully partner with families to support students' progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's professional development calendar reflects ongoing work to improve planning with an eye to anticipating misconceptions and, therefore, "providing multiple entry points to facilitate learning." To ensure that this work takes root, the principal meets with teachers to discuss their scholarship data, with the expectation that all students be given every opportunity to succeed. When she noted a "dip in science" it was addressed immediately. Teachers are to make clear connections between relevant content, homework, and laboratory work. This led to teachers' norming grades, creating more opportunities for students to redo or resubmit work, and holding themselves accountable for their students' academic success. Additionally, the principal collects and evaluates all lesson plans to ensure the impact of professional learning in practice. During faculty and individual meetings with teachers, the principal discusses instructional gaps so that all teachers understand the importance of consistency in delivering instruction. As the principal noted, "Students are the greatest indicators of high expectations."

- Parents shared that they are welcomed into classrooms every Thursday morning with or without an invitation to engage with students in their learning. Parents receive support from teachers so they are equipped to help their children at home. For example, one parent shared that it was difficult to understand her child's math homework. The teacher connected her to an online interactive link so that "If [my son] doesn't understand, we can go online for tutorials." This, she shared, this "gives all students a chance to try it independently, and for me, that worked wonders." One parent assisted in the math class the principal taught. She learned that "we both can get the same answer even if we solve it differently." This was a relief because although her method for calculating was different from her son's, she is now able to support him.

- Parents take enormous pride in the high level of thinking they are seeing in classrooms where they are fully informed of the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards curricula and the aligned exams. One parent shared that her son graduated with four Regents exams completed. "I started him at a Charter School, but this was a better choice because they really push him here." All parents shared that they appreciate the ongoing communications from the principal and all teachers through emails, phone calls, and weekly opportunities to meet with teachers. In particular, the online grading platform keeps them informed of their child's academic progress. Additionally, one parent shared that she and her child work with doctoral candidates in an after school Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) program made possible by the principal.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect articulated beliefs that students learn best when engaged with each other in learning. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into curricula and tasks.

Impact

Classroom practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and offer appropriately challenging tasks to engage all learners. However, there were missed opportunities for all students to demonstrate their higher order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders believe that students learn best when they are engaged in high levels of thinking, participation, and collaboration, and can work through their challenges using teacher-provided scaffolds. In a science classroom, the teacher previewed vocabulary by asking students to sketch their ideas for a visual representation of each of the Earth's surfaces. While this offered an entry point for visual learners, it took time away from collaborative work to map the landscape of the Earth based on analysis of a text and a video wherein students would construct meaning together to demonstrate understanding.

- A math teacher shared that her English Language Learners (ELLs) "never engage in a task without a hands-on approach, color, or manipulatives." In a sixth grade class, students responded to the statement, "All orphans want to be adopted by a good family" and discussed what they noticed in a great depression photograph. An audio recording of the first chapter of the text, *Bud, not Buddy* was available for ELL students. In an English Language Arts (ELA) classroom students worked in small groups as they prepared to write literary essays. Several students received sentence stems or graphic organizers to support them as they wrote. The teacher invited students to share writing strategies based on conferences held the day before. One student preferred a graphic organizer with guided prompts, another citing and explaining her evidence first because it makes "it easier when your answer is the claim." As students worked, the teacher provided each with color coded cards to indicate where they were in their process, and conferenced with those who needed help. A green card indicated "good to go."

- Learning walks are an embedded practice for the purpose of recognizing and identifying trends in practice. This year the focus is on pacing and "consistent use of timing devices and agendas" to engage all learners. In an ELA class, students prepared to distinguish the central idea and use the strongest pieces of evidence to analyze *The New Colossus* by deciding from a selection of prompts, what they needed answer. This led to small group discussions of selected passages to support claims. Activities were thoughtfully timed so that students were fully accountable for working collaboratively and completing their work. For example, the teacher offered three minutes for students to think and jot, three minutes to view a video, and five minutes to fill out one section of the graphic organizer. However, in a science classroom, the learning target for students was to collect quantitative and qualitative data regarding the temperature of different substances. In the attempt to clarify academic vocabulary thought necessary for a conceptual understanding, engagement in the hands on learning was delayed, and therefore, students did not have the opportunity to share ideas, challenge each other's thinking, or demonstrate critical thought.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that all curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
Purposeful decisions are made to build coherence and to promote college and career readiness for all students. ELLs, students with disabilities, and high performers have access to curricula and opportunities to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school implements Expeditionary Learning modules, Go Math, and Engage NY to meet the needs of their diverse population. All lesson plans include reading and writing standards, learning targets, and modifications for students with disabilities and ELLs. Teachers discussed ways they adjust their curricula based on assessment data. For example, when they learned of the difficulty students were having with reading complex texts, teachers emphasized the use of annotation to question the writer. This also resulted in teachers including strategies for unpacking questions with several prompts by circling unfamiliar words, identifying a synonym, and rephrasing the question to articulate what the task required.

- The principal shared that their work this year was to create a coherent set of practices developed around the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* components of engagement and assessment. Emphasis on citing "relevant" evidence was in evidence across curricula documents with targeted writing tasks to support students with precise argument writing. In math, curricula is grounded in real world scenarios.

- Students shared the rigorous tasks they have completed from expository essays to creating a topographic map from a set of numbers. One student said that learning targets, included in all lesson plans, "Help me to understand what I am about to learn and what I can do. This is the first thing we write in our notebooks."

- Teachers shared that they have reworked the models in the Expeditionary Learning curricula so that students can see upper levels of work to strive toward. In math, students highlighted what they needed to do to move up a level. If the student, for example, could not come up with a conjecture, it was circled. Math teachers moved away CMP3 curricula to Engage NY to introduce more challenging tasks for their high performers.

- The humanities team's practice of looking at student work resulted in adjustments to curricula that engage all learners. For example, in considering "How do we assist students in developing inferencing skills?" teachers revised their curricula to include greater emphasis on building background knowledge and emphasizing vocabulary, particularly for their ELLs who might also be unfamiliar with poetic structures. They also support students by identifying common themes that run through the selected set of poetry to be studied. Teachers also realized that students would need a "guiding question to know what they are making inferences about."

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Common assessments are used to determine student progress toward goals across grades and content areas. Teachers regularly check students' understanding of content and tasks.

Impact
Teachers consistently analyze their assessment data to make adjustments to curricula and instruction to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- When analysis of assessment data surfaced that students were struggling with open-ended math questions, teachers implemented a strategy wherein students read the question twice, identify what is required, complete and carry out computations, and go back to evaluate whether or not the method used is reasonable (RICE). This procedure also provides teachers with a window into students' misconceptions which results in one-on-one conferencing, tracking student progress by skill and creating action plans to support students who do not master learning targets.

- Teachers engage in conferencing to assess where their students are and to offer feedback to support student progress. All work products receive a "glow and a grow," that over the course of several drafts, resulted in improved writing products. Students shared that this helps them to "use stronger vocabulary and read to expand on our analysis." Teachers also provide one-on-one support to students during their professional period. A student shared that her teacher pushes her to read more closely and to figure out unfamiliar words independently. The text used a lot of past tense words and even though the students had access to a dictionary it was not until the teacher encouraged students to look at the words before and after it that they figured out the definition. "We hadn't looked deeply but after breaking down the sentence, we actually figured out the definition."

- The school's assessment calendars indicate the assessment, its genre or design, and the rationale for administration. For example, the rationale for the Math Department's midterm exam was to assess students' progress toward goals in order to make adjustments to curricula. The department also sent home holiday packet performance tasks to both reinforce skills taught, and to consider if reteaching was necessary for small groups of students. Similarly, the ELA assessments check for progress, looking for students' awareness of test design, and stamina "through practice with longer and more complex passages."

- The sixth grade team maintains assessment analysis reports at the end of each unit that indicate student misconceptions such as: adding details in writing; understanding the branches of geography study; expanding on opinions with clear reasoning; and paraphrasing cited evidence. For each set of misconceptions, teachers identify next steps: modify graphic organizer to accommodate sections for paraphrasing and quotes; target students for "practice with less complex texts;" utilize a "character trait word bank," and "break down a model response citing accurate evidence to support an inference." A seventh grade analysis report revealed that 23 of 28 students met standards in identifying perspective and using evidence. The next step is to move students to the next standard, and for the teacher to work with students one-on-one to help them comprehend grade level complex texts.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, professional collaborations to promote school goals and Common Core implementation. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share.

Impact

Collaborative practices result in teachers strengthening their instructional capacity, and progress toward goals for group of students.

Supporting Evidence

- In a previous meeting, the ELA/humanities team had analyzed assessment data to focus on reading comprehension strategies to implement over the week. In the meeting observed, teachers shared the targeted practices, and reflected on how the skill-based adjustment supported their students' progress. One teacher helped students recognize the impact certain words have on meaning in a sentence or a prompt, to sharpen their understanding of what is required in an evidence-based extended response. Another teacher focused on ways to discern patterns in literature such as repetition, and creating a graphic organizer with sentence stems that mirror the Common Core exam. In a lesson for ELLs, "We found that students did not understand the text's language so we used reciprocal learning strategies" that offer clarification, questions, summary and prediction with a push to unpack tier two and three words. This resulted in teachers agreeing to next steps: continued emphasis on close reading; support for ELLs in vocabulary development; and listening to students, "We can analyze data, but we need to hear from them where they are shutting down so we will better serve them."

- Teachers shared that they utilize the Bondy protocol for looking at student work that requires the team to begin with a focusing question to guide the analysis, and leads to considering broader instructional implications for the grade. In a January meeting, the humanities team noted that the student they were focusing on had difficulty with vocabulary and citing relevant evidence. This resulted in a shared decision to provide practice in creating gist statements, a visual representation of how claim and evidence connect, and to model how to cite evidence for targeted students. "We always want to learn how to push students and to walk away from our meetings with something we can try out in our classrooms with an emphasis in areas I might need to grow."

- The school's House plan structure allows for groups of teachers who are teaching the same students to work together in grade teams. This also provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate across disciplines. For example, when a math teacher noted that students were having difficulty with graphing, he asked the science teacher to include this in his lessons. The sixth grade social studies team is focused on scaffolding strategies for helping students cite relevant evidence for document-based essay writing. The humanities team is focused on effective conferencing techniques to move students to assessing their progress. In a November team meeting, teachers discussed ways to deepen conferencing discussions. Potential strategies included: reflective questioning; rubrics to guide the discussion; modeling a think aloud strategy for noting strengths and weaknesses; and asking students to "compare their work to a level 4 model" to identify their next steps.