

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

Newtown High School

High School 455

48-01 90th Street

Queens

NY 11373

Principal: John Ficalora

Dates of review: October 19 - 21, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Nancy Gannon

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Newtown High School is a high school with 2942 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 9% Black, 60% Hispanic, 5% White, and 22% Asian students. The student body includes 28% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 84.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders' data analysis within departments results in an understanding of some of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Every assistant principal analyzes teachers' pass rates of students in various content-area courses, and meets with those teachers with weak results to discuss and provide guidance for improving students' pass rates. Because the analysis ends in clear action steps for teachers, these administrative processes push toward better academic outcomes for students.
 - Some departments have looked in more detail at data to have a strong sense of where students are learning and where they are stuck. For example, the math department does a detailed item analysis of common assessments throughout the year to see where students are struggling. By understanding trends and challenges, departments are able to make adjustments that have improved pass rates in classes and on Regents'.
- The school is developing classroom practices that support the learning needs of all students.
 - The school's efforts around differentiated instruction and higher order thinking are ongoing, but there are pockets throughout the building where teaching practices are exemplary. For example, a special education teacher worked with a self-contained population in an English Regents prep class that encompassed sophisticated literature and demanded critical thinking from students. A ninth grade social studies class asked students to look at Supreme Court cases and make connections between the Bill of Rights and democracy. These types of classes engage and push students to progress academically.
- The school uses data to develop goals relevant to student needs.
 - The leadership team uses broad data to develop a sense of what instructional work has to be done in order to move students forward. They have formed specific goals for each department and school-wide goals that target instructional practices, like formative assessment and differentiated instruction. By identifying very specific goals around instructional practice, the school is able to focus on what is going on in the classroom to further student achievement.
 - The leadership team's deep care about the school is evidenced through their clear communication around the need to improve. Although different stakeholders understand that mandate in various ways, everyone wants to see the school meet its goals.
- Parents feel included and supported by faculty and administration across the school.

- Parents articulate a gratitude for the way the school has interacted with them, pointing to the fact that they can easily check on their children's attendance and cutting history through the online system the school has purchased. They also receive phone calls in their home language reminding them of upcoming events. By providing tools that give parents more access to information, they are better equipped to participate in school events and to play a role in decision-making about their child.

What the school needs to improve

- Align all resources, including student and teacher time, in ways that target and support student achievement.
 - The school has redirected some resources this fall term by launching a ninth grade small learning community, and is planning to move fully into small learning communities next year. As a result, the ninth grade with some of the most fragile population is evidencing a significant increase in attendance and academic success. However, at this point, even teachers within this small learning community do not share all the same students, and teacher loads are not yet manageable. Additionally, other fragile populations are not yet receiving sufficient support. Collaborative team teaching classes are not organized to reflect the mandated ratio of general education to special education student. Similarly, some assignments of staff to classes are effected despite the fact that administrators have concerns about teacher's ineffective strategies. Many classes have smartboards, but teachers are not using them or other technology in ways that impact student learning. This lack of alignment between school goals and resources precludes significant gains in students' academic success.
- Design rigorous curriculum that connects across subject areas and highlights key standards so that students have a coherent learning experience.
 - The school's curriculum varies greatly across departments. The social studies curriculum is modified from a regional curriculum map acquired a few years ago, whereas the English curriculum consists of a few pages per course, developed by the department over the summer. Although State standards are referenced in curricula, the school has not chosen any particular standards to highlight within a subject or across the school, nor has curriculum been modified, beyond minor changes to the pacing calendars, to ensure progress among students in the bottom third or among high achievers. Because of these limitations, students are not exposed to a coherent academic experience throughout their classes.
 - Currently, students experience a wide range of academic tasks depending on their classrooms. In a class designed to prepare English language learners to take the English Regents, some students appeared at a loss as to how to begin the assignment. In contrast, a collaborative team teaching math class offered opportunities for students of all levels. Because few academic tasks are built into curriculum, student experience is not consistent.
- Provide more support so that all teachers consistently use assessments to inform instructional decisions and further student learning.

- Although the school has prioritized formative assessment, it is not seen consistently across classrooms. Many teachers have grouped students based on ARIS information, but do not use that data or current information to adjust instruction and meet students' needs. A lack of ongoing assessment aligned to curriculum and standards precludes teachers from identifying and monitoring student progress.
- Currently, the school gives common assessments in English, math, social studies, and foreign language. However, teachers do not use the results of these assessments to understand progress of subgroups within the population, despite the fact that progress among subgroups at the school is extremely uneven. Therefore, there is no evidence that adjustments to curriculum or instruction are made to ensure that every child is achieving.
- Develop a systematic approach to observations and teacher support so that all efforts are targeted in ways that move the school's agenda forward around student learning.
 - Currently, school leaders have a focused list of expectations for teachers, including differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and higher order thinking skills. However, observations and communiqués to teachers sometimes include some of this list and sometimes are focused on other issues. This inconsistency in feedback leads to a lack of instructional coherence across classes, and impedes teachers who have been rated satisfactory from meeting expectations articulated by administrators.
- Create formal systems for monitoring movement toward school-wide and classroom goals so that teachers and school leaders can accurately identify progress toward strong academic outcomes.
 - The school has identified goals for instruction and for student outcomes. However, at this time, there are no clear structures for measuring progress toward those goals. For example, the guidance department has set goals around the number of students passing a Regents exam with a 65 or 85 but have no structure to measure whether they are likely to reach that goal. The absence of a method for tracking progress, limits the collection of information to know when to modify or adjust strategies to reach goals.
 - Many teachers were waiting to set academic goals for students and did not have systems in place to track student goals. Without monitoring progress closely, teachers have limited means for making decisions about modifications or adjustments that could ensure student success.
- Support teachers and teacher teams in using data to set clear academic goals for student subgroups to ensure that all students are learning.
 - At this time, most teachers had not set data-informed goals for students. Some teachers asked students to set their own goals, but rarely were these goals academic. As a result, teachers do not yet have concrete goals as a way to identify the differentiated support necessary for students or to inform classroom instruction.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Newtown High School	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score	X			
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?	X			
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?	X			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		X		
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?		X		
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?	X			
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends?	X			
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?		X		

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X					
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?	X						
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?	X						
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?		X					
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?	X						
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?		X					
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?		X					
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?	X						
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?		X					
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?	X						
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed