

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Columbia Secondary School
Middle School/High School 362

425 WEST 123 STREET
MANHATTAN
NY 10027

Principal: MIRIAM NIGHTENGALE

Dates of review: March 1- March 2, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Alycia Rhinehart

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Columbia Secondary School is a middle/high school with 389 students from grade 6 through grade 10. The school population comprises 17% Black, 46% Hispanic, 22% White, 10% Asian students, and 3% other students. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 96.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teaching teams and individual teachers work to align content area tasks and grade level curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards based on data from analysis of student work (2.2)
 - At present, Columbia Secondary School's curriculum is designed by the school's teaching faculty in consultation with and review by the principal. Curricular modifications, review of student work, and refinement of rubrics, as mechanisms for improving student mastery, are accomplished in grade level teams. Close attention is given to student work products to analyze the effectiveness of curriculum, providing the platform for emphasis on student learning as the driver of instructional and curricular decision-making. For example, during the sixth grade teaching team meeting, the rubric for a math task was revised in an effort to clarify expectations for students' successful completion of the task. Consequently, students' understanding of their own attainment of task requirements is enhanced.
 - Across grade level team meetings, teachers analyze student learning outcomes and student work to identify student strengths and opportunities for growth. In addition, instructional design was given audience and revised to meet the learning needs of students and clarify learning tasks as well as objectives. For example, during the grade 7 teaching team meeting, the short response question was revised to communicate, more succinctly, student expectations and completion of the task so that student success could be optimized.
- The school leader aligns school-wide goals via data-informed and strategic organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support accelerated student learning. (3.1)
 - The principal's data set articulates Columbia Secondary School (CSS) students' outcomes on New York State exams as 92% of students perform at levels 3 or 4 in English language arts (ELA) and 97% of CSS students perform at levels 3 or 4 in math. Albeit, the principal has identified the trend of decline in student achievement throughout middle school years. Principal Nightengale stated, "Since our mastery levels drop for each successive grade level, it is important that we work to have vertical curricular alignment in order to develop students' capacities at each grade level and to accelerate their growth." Toward this end, the principal and the school's content-specific faculty have outlined scope and sequence within content areas as well as between each grade level to identify gaps in skills, content, and information students are expected to know and master. Consequently, students' learning experiences are reflecting a successive acquisition of skill sets, concepts, and information leading to the rehearsal necessary to attain increased levels of mastery across grades.
 - The second goal in the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan includes the principal's and faculty's work to "develop 7 year sequences in the humanities and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) that incrementally develop students' abilities to master increasingly complex tasks." To this end, the principal has identified scheduling and course errors in the highschools that result in loss of credit accumulation necessary to meet State graduation requirements. Consequently, the principal has revised the course sequence within the current and incumbent high school grade levels to reflect New York

State graduation requirements. Teacher teams, within grade levels and within content areas, convene inquiry teams once each week to analyze student work artifacts and student learning outcomes in order to refine instructional delivery products to ensure alignment within and throughout grades as well as content areas in the school. In addition, the principal, in concert with parents intends to prepare students for college readiness via availing at least one freshman-level course at Columbia University to CSS before students graduate in an effort to ensure that student courses of study reduce any achievement gaps through middle school and high school learning experiences.

- The school leader and faculty use collaborative, data-informed processes across content areas and within grade levels to meet the learning needs of individual students and groups of students. (3.3)
 - o The principal has gleaned data from State exams in ELA and math using an item analysis to determine curricular content foci. Additionally, the principal's review of the Comprehensive Educational Plan, (CEP), from academic year 2010-2011, the 2010 Progress Report, and academic intervention statistics, led to resetting the school's goals for the current academic year. They now include the faculty's and principal's work incorporating higher level math tasks in grades 8 and 9, which are intended to result in a 5% increase in mastery, as measured by the New York State ELA and math exams.
 - o The principal ensures that teachers, parents, and students are given voice in articulating and crafting the school's goals to address their concerns regarding Columbia Secondary School's endeavor to contribute to students' college and career readiness. Parents' and students' ongoing review of students' transcripts, long-term goals, student work portfolios, and the online grade book has resulted in increased collaboration amongst parents, students, teachers, and the administrator in an effort to support students' endeavors to reach their learning goals and proffer the support necessary to do so.
- Faculty works collaboratively in inquiry team cycles to share effective teaching practice, develop teaching tools and strategies improving student work products and student outcomes. (3.2)
 - o Throughout Columbia Secondary School's ten-week cycles, teaching teams and individual teachers review and revise rubrics, study results from interim assessments, and examine student learning within curricular units of study via the analysis of student work products, student learning outcomes, and student response to learning experiences prior to and following instructional delivery in classrooms as part of their work in setting and revising students' individual learning goals. Goals set for students in need of additional academic support are addressed via intensive tutoring sessions offered by Columbia University in an effort to ensure that all students are reaching their learning goals and reaching mastery in curricular content.
 - o Columbia Secondary School students participate in end-of-marking period portfolio reviews, self-grading processes via the employment of detailed and clear rubrics, peer reviews accompanied by constructive feedback and possible next steps, and individual self-assessment wherein students identify their own areas of growth and improvement as part of the students' and teachers' work in setting individual and differentiated learning goals for students throughout the curricular content areas. Teachers conference with students throughout the year to target areas for improvement in student learning and incorporate in-class instructional strategies which target students' learning goals and areas of need.

- The school maintains a supportive learning environment that conveys high expectations and students are engaged in their own learning. (1.4)
 - The school cultivates a culture of peer support and social emotional learning via peer analysis and student-to-student critique as well as analysis of work products throughout grade levels and curricular specialties in the school. Teachers pay close attention to students' attendance and call students' homes when students are absent. Teachers are accessible to students after school each day of the week through 5pm to provide students with the social emotional and academic support which encourages student success.
- - Students were active participants in the selection of their current principal. The students participate in school-wide decision-making via student representation on the school leadership team. The social-emotional needs of students are addressed in small group, intensive counseling sessions offered by the school. Students have access to a variety of in-school resources to guide their social emotional and academic growth throughout their tenure in Columbia Secondary School. The school-wide resources available to students include the principal, guidance counselor, teachers, the assistant principal, peers, tutors, technology, and parents resulting in perceptible supports for students' academic and social emotional development.
- The school employs effective student support services and collaborations in order to provide students with a wide range of opportunities to grow academically and socially. (4.4)
 - Partnering with Columbia University provides a vehicle for availing college-level coursework and experiences for its students. Students participate in the chorus at Columbia University and access tutoring three days per week proffered by Columbia University graduate students. Students also participate in the Student Ambassador Program, United Nations Works for You, Urban Advantage Middle School Science Initiative, and Filmmakers of Color United in Spirit. These experiences provide students opportunities to apply their in-class learning within real-world contexts and solidify the importance of driving their own academic and social development.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to align curricula across grades to refine school's endeavor to close the achievement gap and promote postsecondary readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - Columbia Secondary School's curricular emphasis highlights college-readiness content, concepts, and skill sets. The work to complete the school's 7-year sequence is well on its way, as outlined in Columbia Secondary School's 2011-2012 CEP. Consequently, the effectiveness of the newly devised 7-year sequence has not been rendered, limiting how much we know about its impact upon Columbia Secondary School's lower and higher performing students.
 - The focus on 'argument' as a common element featured in the curriculum in several classrooms has served to promote discussion and discourse in Columbia Secondary School. However, the curriculum does not yet evidence a coherent demonstration of this focus skill in various content areas, consequently opportunities for students to transfer this skill is limited hindering students' demonstration of argumentation in varying contexts.

- Further develop pedagogy to provide multiple entry points and extensions for students, particularly higher and lower performing students. (1.2)
 - The principal and faculty believe that differentiation should deliver the same content within classrooms. At present, within Columbia Secondary School's classrooms, differentiation is wrought through teaching strategies, e.g., paraphrasing, questioning, and discussion. Instructional and curricular content are chunked to make it manageable for students who are struggling. Although, entry points to curricular content is varied via instructional strategies, content is not consistently leveled, layered, or supplemented to provide the bridge and scaffolding that struggling students require, therefore, the lowest achieving students' cognitive engagement within classroom instructional delivery is not optimized for the benefit of increasing their academic progress within the classroom's setting.
 - Columbia Secondary School believes that students learn best when they are given opportunity to investigate, seek evidence, explore, take on differing perspectives, and provide supporting answers via substantiation. In some classrooms, students participated in discussions and discourse. In other classrooms, close-ended questioning, restricted student participation/feedback, and teacher-directed learning were evident. As a result, high levels of student thinking and participation were inconsistent, leading to limited student discussion throughout the school's grade levels and content areas.
- Monitor the effectiveness of teaching teams and inquiry team meetings to provide school level trending of improved instruction for all students. (1.3)
 - At present, Columbia Secondary School's faculty meets daily in content teams and weekly for grade level team meetings. The classroom level data is availed to drive the team's discussions and inform classroom level instructional decisions. Improvement of instruction, as a result of the teacher team meetings – content/grade levels – is not observable at the school level. As a result, the data to support the impact of teacher team work upon improved instruction across the school is not yet visible.
 - Columbia Secondary School's student groupings for small group instruction are based upon a 10-week cycle of support for struggling students. Students are assigned to groups based upon classroom level data and identified need (at the classroom level). Teachers assigned to provide small group support to students are content area specialists. The mechanism for gauging the effectiveness of teachers assigned to small group instruction via accountable collaboration with other faculty is absent. Consequently, the impact/optimization of small group instruction is limited.
- Coordinate feedback to classroom teachers with professional so that the system for improving teacher practice is aligned with improved student performance. (4.1)
 - Columbia Secondary School employs the Danielson Framework for providing teachers feedback via recurrent classroom visits during active teaching timeframes. Feedback captured identifies teacher's strengths and opportunities for growth. Alignment of teacher feedback with individual teachers' professional goals is not yet evident, therefore, goals for developing teaching practice goals are not clearly connected to student performance, constraining the opportunity for teachers to improve student learning opportunities via teaching practice development.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Columbia Secondary 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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				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			
1..4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement 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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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