

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

School for Legal Studies

High School 477

**850 GRAND STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11211**

Principal: Monica Ortiz

Dates of review: February 27 – 28, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

School for Legal Studies is a high school with 759 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 58% Black, 39% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 80.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders strategically utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources to promote major initiatives, resulting in progress towards meeting academic goals. (1.3)
 - In conjunction with the faculty, school leaders changed the program of the school to allow teacher teams to meet in department and grade level teams several times a week. Teachers are thus able to discuss, analyze, and revise lessons in order to align lessons more closely to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and create tasks that are more rigorous. During their team meeting, math teachers revised a geometry lesson from last year to ensure that students are engaged in suitable instruction. Additionally, allocation of resources enables staff to use on-line unit and lesson planning and grade reporting programs that are resulting in improved instruction by incorporating more engaging tasks for students and targeting teaching skills to student needs to improve academic outcomes for students. Teaching assignments adjusted mid-year after analyzing Regents' examination results, resulted in the reassignment of a teacher with a record of high pass rates on the English Regents exam to a class of students who have previously failed.
- Students' social and emotional needs are supported in a safe and nurturing environment that contributes to their personal growth. (1.4)
 - This year the school hired two intervention specialists who work closely with students and teachers to resolve conflicts, promote student engagement, improve attendance outreach, and enhance communication with families. One staff member reflected that this collaboration helps teachers to understand the wide range of issues students confront inside and outside of school and reinforces the respectful and trusting relationship between students and teachers. Parents, teachers, and students value the increased communication and believe it contributes to the positive culture of the school. Since 2009, agreement with the statement, "I am safe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms at my school" has increased from 62% to 86% as reflected on the 2012 Learning Environment Survey.
 - Students feel that they are known well by teachers, guidance counselors and support staff and that they can get the help they need for academic as well as personal issues. Students working outside of school at law-related internships arranged by teachers and staff members are motivated to do well in high school and college in order to enter legal professions. A student commented that such opportunities highlight the importance of staying focused and persevering in school. Students who aspire to attend colleges that have law-related programs stated they have been successfully guided by advisors in the process of applying both for admission and for financial assistance.
- A deliberate focus on improving supervision through a common framework strengthens the quality of feedback given to teachers resulting in observations that help teachers improve their practice. (4.1)
 - School supervisors refer to the Danielson teaching framework as they provide support and feedback through the observation process. Feedback to teachers includes examples of strong teaching practices with specific, time-bound

suggestions for ways to improve planning and delivery of instruction. After noting poorly formulated instructional objectives during one lesson, the principal recommended that a teacher read a professional resource for improving instructional strategies, *Designing and Teaching Learning Goals and Objectives: Classroom Strategies that Work* by Robert Marzano. Frequent informal classroom observations and conversations outside of the classroom with school supervisors leads to better understanding of expectations for practice. In one team meeting, teachers reminded each other that their assistant principal urges them to address pivotal questions explicitly during lessons so that students realize the importance of the topic. One teacher stated that she was always able to consult with supervisors about challenges she faces and that “this keeps me coming here happy every day.”

- Determining needs identified through observations conducted with an on-line iObservation program, as well as those areas identified through teacher created surveys, leadership designs professional development conducted by the administration, teachers, and/or network team members. One supervisor recommended that a teacher work on increasing the rigor of questions and activities by attending an upcoming Depth of Knowledge workshop. As a result, teachers report they have many opportunities to participate in cross-content collaborations, intervisitations, and outside professional development on a variety of topics such as the Danielson framework and conducting Socratic seminars.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop teachers' capacity to plan units of study and daily lesson plans that incorporate rigorous and CCLS aligned tasks so that all students have ample opportunity to demonstrate higher order skills. (1.1)
 - A core team of teachers is piloting the use of an on-line tool for curriculum mapping, unit planning to design lessons that build on learning that took place in previous courses, and that addresses next-steps in student learning. Staff are now beginning to turnkey the use of this tool to their department colleagues and are focusing on how to develop essential questions, pivotal questions, and instructional objectives. However, it is often not clear how the lesson plan or the instruction is connected to a unit plan and teachers often reference multiple CCLS standards in their lesson plans without including the tasks that would demonstrate mastery of those standards. As a result, students are not consistently engaged in coherently aligned instructional activities.
 - Although lesson plans reflect a belief in differentiated instruction to engage learners with diverse learning styles, not all teachers are purposefully designing tasks that are differentiated for students with disabilities and/or for English language learners. In one observed class the assignments were designed to have varied levels of text complexity for specific groups of students, in another the teacher planned one assignment for all general education students and a different assignment for all students with disabilities. Most of the lessons were planned for whole-group instruction. The design of rigorous tasks for diverse learners is not consistent across grade levels or across departments resulting in missed opportunities for all students to develop higher order thinking skills.

- Strengthen student-centered pedagogical practice to reflect a unified vision of excellence so that all learners can produce high quality work. (1.2)
 - Although teachers and administrators are focusing on developing unit and lesson plans with a particular focus on including essential and pivotal questions, there is not a consistent practice of higher-order questioning during actual lessons. Many of the questions posed by the teachers, with the student answering back to the teacher, elicited low-level factual responses, instruction was delivered to the whole class, written questions were multiple choice and procedural in nature, and uniform class-wide tasks reflected low levels of rigor. This lack of consistent high-level oral and written questioning limits learning opportunities for students.
 - Some work products exhibit low levels of student participation and ownership with little or no feedback from the teacher aimed at improving the quality of the work. For example, student work contained material that had been cut and pasted from internet sources without attribution and with no teacher feedback addressing the issue. Other writing samples with errors in spelling, grammar, sentence structure or organization were posted on a bulletin board as final versions. This inconsistent level of work quality does not promote development of critical thinking skills among students.
- Increase the use of rubrics, grading policies, formative assessments, and especially opportunities for student self-assessment, to inform instructional adjustments to meet the learning needs of all students. (2.2)
 - While teachers and administrators analyze the results of New York State Regents' exams in order to make decisions about staffing and programming, they do not consistently use data from other sources, such as formative assessments, to design or revise instruction. Additionally, teachers provide rubrics but they are not specific to the assigned tasks so that adequate information is not conveyed or collected around expected outcomes. Students in the math department are beginning to keep track of their progress in their class portfolios, but they do not always receive needed feedback allowing for self-reflection and self-assess in order to attain higher levels of achievement. While department grading policies are in place, all teachers do not uniformly adhere to them, leading to inconsistent feedback to students. Thus, the lack of a consistent practice of analyzing and using student achievement data to inform adjustments to instructional practices is not sufficient and therefore impacting meeting the needs of all students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: School for Legal Studies	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
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?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
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?		X					
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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				
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?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed