

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Gramercy Arts High School

High School M374

**40 Irving Place
New York
NY, 10003**

Principal: Denise DiCarlo

**Dates of review: Apr 11-12, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Gramercy Arts High School is a high school with 495 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 45% Black, 45% Hispanic, 7% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 26% of the students enrolled and girls account for 74%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 84.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Emerging core content curricula challenges students and incorporates cognitively demanding skills through more rigorous academic tasks and activities to promote college and career readiness. (1.1)
 - Content area department teams engage in developing curriculum maps and post them on a web-based curriculum management tool. Individual teachers and teams produce units of study with an emphasis on an interdisciplinary infusion of the arts in core subjects. Project-based tasks in the form of a packet that describes a series of activities and tasks are planned with the expectation that student groups work on them over a span of multiple days in class. In one integrated co-teaching class, students were presented with the “Odyssean Project” that included an array of activities and assignments aligned to the language, listening, and speaking Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) tasks. Regularly planned professional development provided by the network supports curriculum development. Teachers emphasize vocabulary acquisition in core subjects by incorporating vocabulary development into their lessons. Another key standard emphasized is in math. Teams work to align tasks to instructional shifts that require fluency, application and conceptual understanding in math. In one math classroom, group activities included quantitative reasoning to solve and analyze real world quadratic word problems that culminated in individual oral and written (on the blackboard) explanations to the whole class and extended, written responses to defend their thinking that were collected by the teacher. Thus, the school’s focus on curriculum alignment and emphases support CCLS shifts that engage learners in tasks that lead to college and career readiness.
- The principal makes organizational decisions that focus on school-wide goals that support efforts leading to improved student learning. (1.3)
 - The principal takes great pride in sharing that over 45 partnerships with professional arts organizations support the school’s core arts program. Some of the partnerships include senior photography majors from the School of Visual Arts Department of Photography that hold weekly class at Gramercy to mentor visual arts students. Student work is exhibited in the Nef Gallery and the school hallways. Learning through Expanded Arts Program (Leap) offers a full semester residency in which students write plays under the guidance of a professional playwright/teaching artist. The in-depth instruction and published anthology of student work connects directly with the class curriculum and English Common Core Standards. Furthermore, as a screened school for artistically talented students, the school offers courses in fashion design, visual arts, dance, performing arts and music. Teachers support students to develop their talents by honing their skills in these courses, ultimately helping them to prepare portfolios for college entrance that display their gifted work. The school offers an Arts Regents exam plus ten credits in the arts which satisfy requirements for an art endorsed Regents diploma. Many seniors are excited to share their acceptance notices to college programs at private and State colleges so they might pursue their dreams as playwrights, communication artists, musicians and other professions.

- Every day, period three is purposefully scheduled for all teachers to have common planning time. One to two periods are reserved for student tutoring while two per week are dedicated to content area teacher team meetings to plan together, develop CCLS-aligned curricula and discuss departmental concerns. Teachers of English as a second language and special education teachers are invited to contribute to meetings regarding support for these student subgroups. Teams learn protocols and practices to deepen their work in order to create challenging tasks that prepare greater numbers of students to achieve Regents passing rates and credit accumulation. These regular opportunities to collaborate contribute to raising standards for teachers to make pedagogical connections so that students create more meaningful work as evident in student work portfolios.
- Teacher teams engage in collaborative inquiry work that is intended to improve student progress of students in the lowest third citywide in performance. (4.2)
 - Collegial teacher teams work diligently to develop an inquiry approach to understanding the skill deficits of targeted groups of students predominantly in one of each team member's classes. For example, using initial baseline assessments that are teacher-created by subject from former Regents exams, the English team identified that their targeted students are deficient in making inferences when reading text. In another instance, the math team used data to determine that students struggle with solving algebraic equations in word problems. Teams report out to each other their observations of their student work in relation to these deficits and offer some general ways that they support students. One math teacher described how he breaks down math projects into specific tasks on a chart, especially for his special education students who are overwhelmed by the scope of the project. Additionally, the math team asks students to write an extended response as part of CCLS expectations while planning to align their next math task with real world applications. One teacher of the English team expressed that grammar should be taught explicitly. Through these discussions and analysis of student work, these structured professional collaborations are beginning to inform teacher practice and alignment of curricular expectations to CCLS.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish consistent teaching practices school-wide and ensure that there are multiple entry points into the curricula so that all students, especially the lowest third in achievement, make progress. (1.2)
 - The school defines rigor as "...preparing higher level instruction that incorporates group work that is differentiated to the needs of students through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) instructional model." In classrooms visited, lessons typically did not include the elements of "Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) Lesson Plan", the school's framework for instructional expectations. For example, class beginnings did not include a mini lesson that incorporates both explicit direct instruction of the intended skill and content outcome. For most of the period, students are in groups intended to generate student discussion and collaboration

in order to complete worksheets and/or two to three day task projects. However, most students are not equipped with accountable talk strategies, nor do they understand protocols for group work and, therefore, most of their time is spent either working independently or interacting with a partner for task clarification. Furthermore, scaffolded tasks were carefully planned in one social studies and one math classroom to ensure that all learners, particularly those who are struggling, have access to the content and requisite skills for achievement. However, this is not a consistent practice; in most classrooms observed all students were working on the same task with no supports, such as leveled texts or modified language, to explain the intended outcome. In one integrated-co-teaching science class with six students present, following a lengthy “do-now” assignment, students watched a Dr. Oz video on human reproduction and were then asked to complete a graphic organizer based on the video. Students struggled with the high level vocabulary and concepts used in the video and could not complete this “one size fits all” task. Consequently, activities without questions that match the appropriate depth of knowledge for student group skill building and reinforcement of academic vocabulary further restricts student demonstration of higher order thinking and access to curriculum. Thus, the lack of consistent and effective use of scaffolding techniques limiting student thinking and participation results in uneven levels of meaningful student work products across classrooms.

- Fortify assessment practices so that leaders and faculty can develop a deeper understanding of the performance and progress of individuals by group and subject in order to inform curriculum and instruction. (2.2)
 - Teachers review Regents’ item analysis in content areas to determine students’ ability and to measure progress toward credit accumulation. Teacher teams create Regents-based, baseline assessments to initiate their inquiry work by identifying content and/or skill deficits prohibiting student progress. While the administration chose not to use administer Acuity as a common assessment this year, no replacement was offered to teachers nor was any created by them that would measure common skills to evaluate student progress across classes and over time. Likewise, school leaders do not routinely progress monitor reliable, common assessment data, such as performance tasks across content areas, particularly for students in the lowest third in performance, and therefore are not sufficiently informed in order to make adjustments to action plans. Furthermore, when asked, teachers are not always clear on specific student individual education plan (IEP) goals and, therefore, do not have specific and consistent measures in place that would assess progress toward them. Additionally, rubrics that were reviewed when attached, at times, to student work are not always aligned to the rigorous expectations of the CCLS. For example, one rubric included a measure for “timeliness” that lowered the overall level assigned to the student work based on whether it was submitted on time. On the other hand, rubrics, used to assess work of those students in the International Baccalaureate track and the Advancement Via Individual Determination program, include more rigorous expectations. Moreover, at a team meeting one teacher expressed her frustration regarding inconsistencies across English classes as she declared, “We really have to standardize the writing assignments and the rubrics.” These inconsistencies in the value and use of common assessments hamper the school’s ability to inform

curricular and instructional adjustments to better support student learning and progress.

- Across classrooms, teachers circulate to check for understanding during individual and group work. Questioning, collecting an exit slip or worksheets that were distributed as the lesson task are some examples of how teachers assess whether students achieved the intended outcome of the lesson. One social studies teacher provided actionable feedback to students on their exit slips. Although most teachers circulated during their lesson to facilitate understanding, there were missed opportunities to redirect and refocus misunderstandings, particularly among former English language learners and special education students. For example, in one class a student, not understanding a task expectation, wrote inaccurate responses to a vocabulary assignment based on a chapter in the text, *Homer*. Furthermore, upon review of student work with a small group of students in addition to reviewing work portfolios found in some classrooms, most students are not expected to self-assess their work against a rubric or other measure. Consequently, not all students can articulate a deep understanding of what they should know and be able to do, nor can they reflect on their next learning steps. In turn, teachers cannot always make accurate adjustments to instruction to meet students' needs. This hampers their progress toward independence and success beyond high school, especially for English language learners and special education students.
- Strengthen the evaluation of instructional practice with effective feedback to teachers and focused professional development that results in professional growth and improved student progress. (4.1)
 - The framework that informs the school's teacher development efforts for lesson planning is entitled, "Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) Lesson Plan" and "Helpful Suggestions for EDI Focused Lesson Planning". Recently, talent coach visits have reintroduced school leaders to the Danielson research-based teaching framework as a measure for teacher effectiveness. However, school leaders' feedback following classroom observations does not indicate any consistent, substantive connections to the school's framework documents or the Danielson rubric. For example, one written recommendation by an assistant principal was, "Continue to prepare your classroom for the Quality Review visit on April 11 & 12." Another written, next step to a ninth grade English teacher by the principal in response to meeting student needs during a lesson was, "See UDL handout from the February faculty meeting." Likewise, professional development to support teacher growth predominantly occurs during monthly faculty meetings and network and citywide off-site workshops. Teacher leaders, a data specialist, and an aspiring intern-administrator share information with teams from off-site meetings. Differentiated opportunities through consistent, on-site professional development design based on observations, student work and data, and classroom occasional inter-visitations are limited. These inadequate practices result in a lack of support of teacher development and clear expectations for pedagogical improvement, thus hampering academic growth of students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Gramercy Arts High School	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