

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

High School for Community Leadership

High School Q328

**167-01 Gothic Drive
Jamaica
NY 11432**

Principal: Carlos Borrero

Dates of review: February 12-13, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Juan Mendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The High School for Community Leadership consists of 267 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 48% Black, 27% Hispanic, 2% White, and 20% Asian students. The student body includes 25% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 86.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers effectively align curricula to key standards detailed in the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) to engage students and support their learning. (1.1)
 - Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), articulated as a focus in the CIE, enable the teaching of critical skills which overlap into several subject areas. Reading standard one citing, “strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text,” is a major thrust at the school. Lessons were observed where students referenced primary and secondary source documents with the purpose of composing claims and counterclaims regarding revolutionary ideals during Napoleonic times. Additionally, evidence of lesson plans and rubrics across grades and subject areas detail clear learning experiences and high expectations aligned to instructional shifts in literacy. This emphasis on key standards increases the robust level of rigor in classrooms promoting college and career readiness and also allows for interdisciplinary unit planning.
 - Students spoke of momentous efforts made by teachers to support them in school. One student remarked that, “Teachers sacrifice a lot of their personal time to plan lessons and make them more interesting and this allows us to learn.” Other students elaborated on teachers’ attempts to utilize differentiated instruction through student interest and varied levels of learning. These curricular efforts become manifest in lesson plans that address student deficiencies in written work products. Teachers take a mastery-based learning approach by providing students with deliberately crafted follow-up questions that push student thinking to higher levels of cognitive engagement, paying extra attention to English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). Overall, this ongoing means of refining curricula to target all students through multiple entry points increases student engagement, and has resulted in a 92% passing rate on the United State history Regents examination.
- Teaching practices aligned to a school wide belief provides students with challenging learning tasks that encourage high levels of inquiry and collaboration among students. (1.2)
 - The school prioritizes the importance of engaging students in a productive struggle to facilitate deep thinking including critical thinking, analysis and problem solving. The principal shared that, “Our philosophy is based on the ideas of inquiry, exploration, and appreciation.” The English and social studies classes visited upheld this central tenet through Socratic seminars, writing from sources, and metaphorical thinking. Mathematics classes creatively challenged groups of students to apply their levels of fluency to real world applications that incorporated Venn diagrams and surveys, culminating with a writing segment. The 87% average passing rate in all classes confirms the fact that this manner of challenging students is beneficial.

- Teachers use innovative approaches to encourage collaboration among students. In one science class a teacher was using the overhead projector as a kinesthetic example to define endothermic reactions. This prompted scientific inquiry and higher order thinking by opening the discussion to students who challenged this definition. This resourceful approach clearly engaged the scientific mind. Additionally, superlative written work products revealed increased levels of both peer and self assessment. Engaging students through the inquiry approach has elevated the school's credit accumulation to above 80% across all grade levels.
- The school promotes a safe and nurturing environment permeated by trust and collaboration where students benefit from effective supports that positively impact their academic success.(1.4)
 - The school thrives on its ability to engender trust and collaboration as an ongoing strategy to perpetuate a positive learning environment. In one instance, an altercation between two students prompted a school-wide assembly where school leaders clearly disseminated expectations and norms to students. Students spoke of collaboration as the key for any "program for community leadership." The principal notes that the school's theory of action "includes leveraging students to deepen the culture through the creation of student organizations and the integration of students into the organizational fabric of the school." This has resulted in student generated clubs and a culture of caring and respect. In addition, the school utilizes structures to ensure that students are well known by adults in the building. For instance, the staff's training as educators for social responsibility (ESR) has allowed them to establish trusting relationships with students that guide students in character education and violence prevention. These relationships are personalized through the school's structured advisory program which meets regularly. The Learning Environment Survey affirms that adults provide the proper guidance with 93% of students agreeing that "The adults at my school help me understand what I need to do to succeed in school." This nurturing manner has created a safe environment for students where adults communicate critical next steps to ensure student success.
- Teachers effectively use a wide range of assessments aligned to the curricula resulting in analysis that provides a clear understanding of student performance and guides instructional decision making. (2.2)
 - Teachers work in teams to plan CCLS aligned assessments that drive instruction on an ongoing basis. Social studies research projects incorporate the use of digital literacy through reputable subscription databases such as Journal Storage (JSTOR). Several teachers opined that the assessments they use require students to conduct research to present knowledge, which deepens student understanding through the articulation of supported claims. Teachers explained that the examination of charts containing results from baseline assessments, are used to provide feedback to students and create goals at the onset of units. The disaggregated data from these diagnostic assessments has resulted in the school wide curricular decision to support newly developed grading policies which accentuate the importance of using varied assessments as accountability tools.

- School leaders excavate data with teacher teams to close the achievement gap for subgroup populations. New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSELSAT) data guides the in-class grouping of ELLs. One teacher insists, “We are keenly aware of how to pair students together.” This pairing process is used for informal assessments on writing tasks where ELLs respond in their native language. The principal clarified that data is used not only to group students but also to track students, “based on proficiency of particular Common Core skills.” Teachers use charts to delineate the acquisition of skills such as questioning, inference and interpretation. Students are ranked based on their mastery of said skills and instruction is adjusted around these findings. The outcome of these modes of assessment is seen in the high percentage of students in the school’s lowest third earning 10 or more credits.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the use of professional collaboration to build teacher capacity and leadership as well as further the analysis of student work to promote strategic adjustments to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (4.2)
 - Teacher teams are self-directed entities divided by grade level to access timely data mostly in the form of student work. Teachers discern promising practices by using the Authentic Teaching, Learning and Assessment for All Students (ATLAS) protocol on Learning from Student Work, which stems from Harmony Education Center. Although student work analysis protocols are restricted to once per month, the school manages to strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers by targeting student skill deficiencies. Moreover, while the examination of student work exposes leverage points for cross-curricular teaching opportunities, the school has determined that common planning meetings will be entirely optional. This is evident in the school’s weekly meeting schedule, which states explicitly that “Teachers have the option to plan independently or in self-selected teams as needed.” This results in a disproportionate amount of teachers engaging in professional collaboration on a sustained and regular basis.
 - Teachers are empowered to voice their opinions on critical matters that affect learning. Team meetings provide the venue for professional dialogue and shared leadership. However, many of the key instructional decisions made by teachers are not efficiently implemented or monitored. Conclusions drawn by teachers, such as the suggestion of “more scaffolding,” become vague iterations that are unclearly documented or addressed in minutes from the aforementioned meetings. Consequentially, teacher leader capacity building is hindered by the inability to effectively devise structures that address suggested modifications.
- Further develop systems to regularly evaluate and adjust curriculum, instructional and organizational practices and school culture to meet learning needs of students and expectations of CCLS. (5.1)

- The school is expanding its use of a handful of resources for processing information that allows all constituents to oversee individual student progress. Datacation's online grade book provides students and parents with homework assignments and the results of regular assessments, although timely feedback to students based on their individual needs is not prioritized. While this work is effective at creating an effective level of transparency, teachers are gradually becoming accustomed to using this system for the purpose of making instructional adjustments. This results in an over-reliance on a system that has not prompted teachers to make significant adjustments in ongoing curricular practices.
- The school has developed its own survey to gauge the effectiveness and the overall needs of teacher teams. These surveys help to hone in on a handful of opinions related to teamwork on select Common Core standards. However, this approach inconsistently encompasses the key requirements needed to improve the limited range of skill sets among students. The principal states that he visits team meetings to "evaluate first-hand the work being done." Nevertheless, the principal also points out that, "The intended outcome is better alignment to new standards." While this practice allows a focus on several new standards aligned to instructional shifts, it does not permit the staff to become immersed in the full scope and sequence of the Common Core in response to students' learning needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: High School for Community Leadership	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