

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Newtown High School

High School Q455

**48-01 90 STREET
QUEENS
NY 11373**

Principal: JOHN FICALORA

Dates of review: Oct 22 - 24 2012

Lead Reviewer: Juan Mendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Newtown High School is a high school with 2572 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 9% Black, 60% Hispanic, 5% White, and 25% Asian students. The student body includes 30% English Language Learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 85.37%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders organize resources and time in order to support instructional goals and increase student outcomes. (1.3)
 - The school makes use of its expansive resources to support best instructional practices in order to advance student learning. For example, students regularly use laptops to engage in the production of meaningful work products such as research assignments and multi-media presentations. This allows students to become immersed in instructional goals that emphasize Common Core shifts. Furthermore, the school institutes an Extended Day program for under-credited students and hosts a Saturday Academy to provide students with consistent remedial support. These extra resources and support have led to higher achievement on Regents assessments in core subject areas.
 - School leaders have structured common planning time for all teachers in order to continue to strengthen small learning communities. Teacher teams use common planning time for targeted inquiry that entails professional dialogue around the analysis of student work. Additionally, student data from classroom assessments guides discussions around best teaching strategies and student progress. Teacher teams were observed discussing the use of ARIS to monitor student progress and to collaborate outside of school time. Overall, this approach has increased the rigor of writing tasks as evidenced by an increase in argumentative and expository student work samples.
- School leaders promote school improvement by maintaining focused, data-based goals that are closely monitored in order to improve teacher practice. (3.1)
 - Schools leaders passionately accentuate goals on attendance, graduation, and scholarship. The principal stated that “We wish to increase our attendance rate by 4% and our Regents pass rate by 3%.” Action plans for attendance provide detail on incentives for students and use contests to boost student morale and participation. Students who are missing credits are identified and closely tracked by the Guidance Department. Mentors are assigned to select students for more contiguous tracking. This heightened emphasis on attendance and academic achievement has allowed the school to meet its Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) goal which states, “By June 2012 the number of students passing the ELA Regents Exam with a grade of 65 or higher will increase by 3%.” This is evident in the passing rate on the ELA Regents Examination, which has moved from 55% in June 2011 to 68% in June 2012, an increase of 13 percentage points.
 - Department assistant principals disseminate critical information to instructional leads, gathered from needs assessment surveys, walkthroughs and teacher inter-visitations. Instructional leads use this data to spearhead the school’s vision to improve teacher’s professional development. School leaders are continuing to garner support for the development and alignment of curricula with the Common Core Learning

Standards (CCLS). For example, minutes from teacher team meetings highlight ongoing adjustments to cycles of inquiry. This has led to a shift in instructional practices which is linked to professional development efforts that involve the teacher creation of performance tasks aligned to CCLS. As a result of this use of data-based goals as the catalyst for change, the school's passing rate on all state examinations has increased substantially and the four year graduation rate increased by 6% to 68.4%.

- Teachers benefit from an observation process that is grounded in the Danielson framework and allows for the implementation of effective instructional techniques. (4.1)
 - School leaders devote significant time to the observational process. Ongoing instructional rounds are conducted daily with feedback provided promptly to teachers that is aligned to student work across all subject areas. Teachers interviewed during this Review, spoke of implementing strategies such as “differentiating functions,” “entry points for learning” and “entrance and exit slips.” Samples of the aforementioned artifacts were gathered during classroom visits. The ongoing use of these strategies is consistently encouraged by administrators in their feedback. Teachers are also given ample opportunities to reflect on their instruction, and administrators collect and analyze these reflections. This strategy allows school leaders to determine ways to further sustain professional growth in order to strengthen students’ academic performance.
 - School leaders provide ongoing feedback to teachers using the Danielson Framework. The school shared artifacts that detail the process for both formal and informal observations. These artifacts include written reports for teachers that emphasize particular components of the Framework and provide clarity regarding next steps. Moreover, professional development agendas detail questioning and discussion techniques as a primary focus and follow-up to the observation process. This ongoing professional support is leading to improvements in teaching practices that has resulted in a common set of expectations maintained by the vast majority of teachers across the school that is leading to teachers’ growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase the alignment of curricula across grades and subject areas to key Common Core Standards and refine units in order to increase cohesion and advance postsecondary readiness. (1.1)
 - School leaders have made some efforts to guide teachers in the development of curricula across grade levels and subject areas aligned to target CCLS. However, a greater curricular emphasis remains on Regents courses preparation. In most classes visited, subject content focused on preparing students for Regents Examinations using sample Regents tasks. Inconsistencies were found across classrooms whereby some tasks did not contain appropriate rigor to enable English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities to demonstrate postsecondary readiness or the knowledge base for upcoming national assessments on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). For example, some English Language Learners focused on

writing a descriptive essay on a childhood experience. However, Common Core Standards for grades 9-12 specifically avoid descriptive essays and only call for the use of descriptions in narrative writing. While the school remains focused on the NYS Regents and instructional shifts that are meant to promote college and career readiness, there is a curricular imbalance that accentuates Regents readiness over postsecondary readiness as evidenced in classroom tasks.

- Increase teacher capacity in designing varied learning experiences aligned to a school wide belief system and differentiated to meet diverse student needs that promote cognitive engagement for all students. (1.2)
 - Although some teachers used visuals to engage students at the onset of classes, multiple entry points were not apparent in the majority of classrooms visited. The protocols that teachers relied on frequently involved recitation, followed by students being placed in groups to complete the same task. Teachers pointed out that; “Students are assigned roles based on past performance, class work and homework,” which asserts a belief in differentiation. However, students seemed unaware of roles imposed upon them. In classes observed, students were asked to collaborate in an attempt to solve equations or write paragraphs. But, student groupings tended to be random and only perpetuated higher-order skills in some cases. Student choice in learning was uneven in all classrooms visited. Students were observed to be more compliant than engaged in deeper and more meaningful instruction. Thus, the lack of consistent challenging student engagement, with differentiated tasks to support all learners at their instructional levels, hinders the development of critical thinking skills as evidenced in student work products.
- Increase the alignment of rubrics to key Common Core Standards and curricula, to identify student achievement trends across grade levels in order to inform effective instructional adjustments to meet all student needs. (2.2)
 - The school’s 2011-12 Learning Environment Survey serves as evidence that students complete a large percentage of assessments “using multiple sources of information” to defend and challenge ideas. In English classes, data from common assessments such as the Regents-based critical lens essay, is used by teacher teams to measure student growth across grade levels and has led to an increase in teaching strategies. For example, modeling and guided instruction was apparent in social studies and ICT classes containing large numbers of English language learners and students with disabilities. However, across content areas not all teachers provide clear course-specific criteria aligned to assessments. A considerable proportion of teachers from other subjects use their own CCLS performance tasks, which are not accompanied by rubrics or the disaggregation of data. As a result, effective adjustments to instruction based on data analysis, limits teachers’ ability to plan appropriately for the identified needs of all students, across all content areas.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Newtown 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