

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Secondary School for Arts &
Technology**

Secondary School Q560

**47-07 30th Place
Long Island City
NY 11101**

Principal: Annie Seifullah

Dates of review: April 8-9, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Juan Mendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Secondary School for Arts and Technology is a middle school/high school that consists of 599 students from grade 7 through grade 12. The school population comprises 6% Black, 58% Hispanic, 14% White, and 22% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 51.4% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48.6%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The classroom observation process is grounded in the Danielson framework and allows for the implementation of effective instructional techniques and support professional development. (4.1)
 - The Danielson Framework guides school leaders in both formal and informal observations. The principal states that a crucial goal aligned to this framework is “the need to provide immediate follow up within two days of the observation.” With each teacher being informally observed a minimum of six times a year, feedback from administrators is actionable and ongoing. Formal observations occur three times per year with an emphasis on untenured teachers. During the observation process, administrators analyze teacher lesson plans, resources, and student artifacts such as essays and unit examinations to tailor feedback to the immediate needs of individual teachers as well as concerns that are apparent from student work products. Teachers’ state that they feel supported through the observation feedback provided. This has prompted the school wide implementation of suggested strategies such as exit tickets and the use of textual evidence in writing to support school wide goals and professional growth.
 - School leaders chart emergent trends that stem from observations not only to provide feedback for teachers, but also to plan professional development. For example, after the principal reviewed the quality of student work products, she created professional support for teachers around intervention plans to improve student writing. In the middle school, this resulted in a greater number of English teachers engaging in writing conferences with their students to guide them on providing evidence to support their arguments and editing skills. The emphasis on writing skills has yielded an increase in evidence based research papers subjects.
- The school community appreciates the safe, respectful, and orderly school environment and the support for the personal, social-emotional and academic development of students. (1.4)
 - The school community values the positive organizational climate of the school. One student remarked, “Teachers prevent drama in school. I feel safe because people are not rude.” Parents shared that they are very pleased with teachers’ responsiveness via email, when student inquiries are made. The principal added that, “We have a strong and active United Student Organization.” They have suggested many of the students clubs, which are far too numerous to list. As a result, Wagner is among the top 2% of its peer schools with an exceptionally high score on Safety and Respect in the NYC Learning Environment Survey (LES) in the 2012 school year.
 - School leaders establish structures to deepen understanding of student’s academic, social, and emotional needs. For example, another college counselor, who was recently hired, serves to provide additional guidance for the school’s increasing number of college bound students. One student claims, “I like the environment. I am known by the staff.” This

sentiment was agreed upon by the vast majority of the student team and shared with this reviewer. In addition, this allows more time for other guidance counselors to support students in conflict resolution, cultural differences and dealing with transitioning from high school to college. As a result of the emphasis on meeting students' social, emotional and academic needs the high school has increased its graduation rate by 6% from 2011 to 2012.

- School leaders convey high expectations that support learning so that faculty and families achieve success in helping students meet their goals. (3.4)
 - The school thrives on communicating a vision of high expectations. This vision surfaces in the school's teacher/student handbook as well as in the school's consistent use of the Danielson Framework. Timely pre and post observation conferences build strong relationships between teachers and administrators. A shared understanding of the need to push students to succeed is omnipresent. Additionally, average scholarship reports of 87% are indicative of a thriving environment where teachers hold themselves accountable for student progress.
 - The school skillfully partners with parents to engender trust and collaboration among vital constituents. Parents spoke of "Pupil Path" as a vital tool to track pupil progress. The principal noted that Pupil Path now features a new tab that allows parents to assess the college readiness of their children. Additionally, the school's college office provides widely attended parent workshops on such topics as financial aid, finding a college, and the college application process. Monthly newsletters provide a follow-up and serve as reminders of crucial deadlines relevant to the college application process. These newsletters are sent home to parents of children in grades 11-12. Parents state that "The communication is strong" in the school. This cultivation of college readiness skills between the school and families has led to substantial increases in the school's college readiness index.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen planning of curricula and increase rigor in academic tasks so that lessons promote high levels of thinking and cognitive engagement for all students. (1.1)
 - Across grades and subject areas, most curricula include benchmarks to delineate prescribed learning targets. In addition, the school is nearing the end of their first year in a three-year curriculum mapping initiative meant to emphasize key Common Core standards. The school has a private webpage that contains several exemplary lesson plans and maps to elevate transparency of goals and levels of understanding. However, these materials are limited in scope and sequence and do not encompass key standards delineated in the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) or prioritize Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Consequently, there is an overemphasis on curriculum mapping that has not yielded viable instructional units and curricula that remains neither seamless nor

cohesive, in order to support all students with ongoing academic achievement for college and career readiness skills.

- The principal accentuates the importance of developing a shared understanding of what constitutes rigor. She points out that “Our definition of rigor is mental sweat: Getting people to be uncomfortable.” While this definition establishes the importance of engaging students in a productive struggle, we examined curricula-based performance tasks where rigorous habits were constricted. For example, we observed several lesson plans that reveal ongoing efforts to engage students with more complex texts, yet student work products were riddled with shortcomings such as inadequate text citation. In a number of other classes, the movement towards rigorous instruction leads to an inclination to teach creatively rather than closely, thus misaligning instructional shifts to instructional practices to support all students, including English language learners (ELL’s). As a result, inconsistencies in rigorous instruction across all grades and subject areas abound, which limits opportunities for all students to succeed.
- Promote consistency to ensure teachers strategically provide multiple entry points so that lessons fully challenge all students and result in meaningful student work products. (1.2)
 - Teaching practices are inextricable linked with the school’s vision around arts and technology. We saw teachers frequently using the SMARTboard and students immersed in highly creative and artistic projects for science such as a cellular models sculpted with jelly beans. However, we sparsely recognized emphatic attempts to harness multiple entry points in assessment or instruction in most subject areas. Although one social studies class swiftly incorporated a differentiated stations activity, we more frequently found students with disabilities (SWDs) grouped together with a lack of scaffolds and supports. This pattern of sporadic use of discernible scaffolds and differentiation for ELLs and SWDs in the majority of classes results in limited student cognition of complex material. Moreover, 85% of Wagner’s peer schools outperform them with a greater percentage of lowest-third students earning ten or more credits during freshman year.
 - Teachers build more advanced cognitive structures in students by allowing students to take ownership of their learning through the completion of newly instituted research papers that align with writing standard 1: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. However, student written work products we reviewed typically entail fill-in-the blanks activities or responding in groups to a series of questions with answers prescribed in advance. Other work products include student poetry and written reports where learning parameters are unclearly delineated in accompanying rubrics. Thus, most student work products are not fully representative of college and career readiness. A marginal average score of 69 on the Global History Regents Examination is testament to the dearth of rigorous instruction.

- Improve the use of assessment results to consistently monitor student progress and ongoing classroom checks for comprehension to inform curricular and instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all students. (2.2)
 - The middle school uses NYCDOE periodic assessments to determine the percentage of students meeting academic proficiency. Both the Acuity Predictive and the Performance Series are used at middle and high school levels to gauge student progress. While these exams allow administrators to gather student data pertaining to learning targets, teacher teams are not using this benchmark data to articulate or implement action plans that entail organized measures for curricular improvement, or to provide actionable feedback to students. Consequently, this has led to a decrease on the high school's Progress Report in the area of performance, trending from a "C" to a "D" from 2011 to 2012.
 - Teachers make use of proven practices as levers in checking for understanding. "Exit slips" or "exit tickets" are commonplace strategies that drive instruction on an ongoing basis, and teachers provide these regular checks for understanding to measure student learning. However, data gathered through these daily assessment practices is infrequently used to adjust instruction. While most teachers check for understanding at the close of a lesson, we observed numerous teachers who did not engage in on the spot lesson adjustments to support student comprehension. For example, teachers were observed dominating class discussions and were often unable to redirect questions to deepen understanding. As a result of this type of emphasis, the majority of teachers infrequently use objective assessment data as a means toward making instructional adjustments or on the spot checks for student comprehension.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

Robert D. Wagner, Jr. Secondary School for Arts and Technology							
	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score							
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