

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Renaissance High School for Musical Theater & Technology

08X293

**3000 EAST TREMONT AVENUE
BRONX, NY 10461**

Principal: MARIA N HERRERA

Dates of review: October 23-24, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Carron Staple

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Renaissance High School for Musical Theater & Technology is a high school with 469 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population is comprised of 25% Black, 64% Hispanic, 8% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 38% of the students enrolled and girls account for 62%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-2012 was 87.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Across all classrooms, teachers use common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that yield information to determine student progress and next steps to improve their performance. (2.2)
 - Teachers use common language and terms, in addition to common writing assessments and rubrics, which are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) which provide information to teachers about specific learning targets they need to focus on with their students in order to close instructional gaps. For example, students in every grade receive a diagnostic assessment aligned with the common core standard for writing, for which each student must provide specific evidence from a particular text to support their written argument. The teachers use these diagnostics to determine the varying entry points for each student and determine what type of intervention is needed. This results in teachers developing goals and specific recommendations for each student. Another example of how teachers provide targeted support to students is evidenced in the students' "Progress Reflective Guide" which results in every teacher being able to determine areas of weakness, strength, set new goals and next learning steps needed to achieve those goals. This information is shared with students, ensuring that they are aware of the specific areas in need of improvement, allowing them to take greater ownership of their progress towards mastery of the standards.
 - Teachers use a variety of strategies to check for student understanding in lessons such as electronic clickers, pre-determined "hinge-point" questions, and entrance/exit slips, that allow them to make timely decisions about re-teaching and provides information on those students that may not be grasping concepts. For example, in one class the teacher provided questions on a PowerPoint and gave the students five minutes to respond using the electronic clickers enabling her to immediately see which students answered correctly and which students did not. This then led to an immediate intervention and feedback to support the students who answered incorrectly. In other classes the teachers utilized exit ticket questions to assess if the learning objectives for the day were achieved resulting in immediate feedback for the teacher to determine where to continue for the next day's instruction. As a result of these school wide practices, teachers are able to make timely and effective instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all students.
- The school aligns curricula and performance tasks to state standards and makes deliberate choices on how to integrate the common core learning standards into units of study in order to improve student achievement. (1.1)
 - The principal and her staff have made purposeful decisions around school-wide unit planning that clearly focuses on embedding anchor standards for informational text into curricula. All teachers use a backwards design unit planning template modified from Wiggins and McTighe that focus on habits of mind, enduring understandings and essential questions and assessments, which ensures consistency among

all teachers and a unified approach to how instruction is delivered and managed to support a variety of learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Teachers incorporate strategies in curriculum documents in the implementation of student tasks across classrooms, such as Cornell note-taking skills, marking up the text, determining importance and big ideas, analyzing cause and effect and identifying key content vocabulary for understanding, which results in improvements in writing as evidenced by student responses to informational text. Additionally, learning activities include inquiry and Socratic discussions, enabling all students to access content via multiple entry points, to demonstrate their thinking.

- The school provides a safe, engaging, nurturing, and highly functioning learning environment that fosters a college bound culture where students feel valued, respected, and prepared for life after high school. (1.4)
 - Social-emotional and academic needs of students are addressed through a formalized small school structure where each student is known well by teachers and support staff through an advisory structure and case conferencing, which places them at the center of all learning. The school maintains an open door policy where students feel comfortable and safe to discuss their needs with administrators, teachers and counselors, which results in a positive and inclusive culture. The learning environment aligns to the principal's belief that all adults are responsible for advocating for students and providing them with college and career linkages via the College Now Program at Mercy College, the addition of multiple Advanced Placement courses and the collaborative partnership with College Summit which provides early exposure to college level skills and concepts during the daily advisory period. The school has a college-bound culture where parents are supported in helping their children meet rigorous expectations and students are prepared to successfully meet graduation requirements and transition to their ultimate goal of college and careers. Students discuss having a voice in decision-making and are able to share their concerns during student council, School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings and individually with their teachers and administrators. Students make appointments with the principal to discuss proposals for clubs, trips, and programs they would like to have at their school. For example, the students discussed their desire for international travel to give them a greater understanding and deeper knowledge of what they are learning about in school. Now the students travel to Italy with their peers and teachers to enhance their educational experiences and make stronger connections to world history. These initiatives have resulted in increased student voice and leadership and ensure the development of effective personal and academic growth.
- School leaders and staff consistently and effectively communicate high expectations to all students and staff, utilizing parents as key partners in supporting student progress that so that students can achieve and grow academically. (3.4)
 - The principal has built a culture of collaboration and high expectations where teachers identify their professional goals via a survey, and in consultation with their supervisors, about the areas they are in need of support and growth, resulting in targeted professional development that

support their individual goals as well as school-wide goals. The school is involved in the Teacher Effectiveness Pilot where post-observation conversations connected to the Danielson framework around specific competencies; 1e-designing coherent instruction, 2b-establishing a culture for learning, 3b-using questioning and discussion techniques and 3c-engaging students in learning, are memorialized in written feedback and tracked on a spreadsheet in Google docs, so administrators and teachers can view and track performance. This practice ensures teachers are reflective and align their instruction to improving student outcomes and progress. This culture of collaborative communication includes students and their families as they receive frequent communication via phone calls, emails and regular mail related to their attendance, academic progress and behavior. Parents expressed their appreciation of the school's efforts to provide information, parent workshops and an open door policy that makes them feel valued and respected. Parents commended the school in preparing their children for college, and for ensuring that their social/emotional needs are always being met. This coupling of high expectations and effective communication among school leaders, parents, teachers and students, results in all stakeholders holding themselves and each other accountable for achieving their goals. The parents appreciatively spoke of numerous meetings where they meet to get a better understanding of expectations and requirements for promotion and graduation. Both students and their families discussed the positive impact the guidance staff has had on their relationship with the school, and how parents and their children are well-informed and able to navigate the road to college and careers as well as any social-emotional or academic issues that may arise during the school year. This has resulted in an increased graduation rate from 79% in 2010-2011, to 80.7% in 2011-2012, which meets the State's goal.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to improve questioning strategies and techniques to increase academic rigor in all classes. (1.2)
 - Teaching practices across most classrooms consistently include differentiated instruction and high levels of engagement, as evidenced in the planning of instruction to enable thoughtful classroom discussions and dialogue between students. In every lesson plan and classroom observed, teachers had the acronym WILF (What I'm Looking For) written on the board which informs the class about what objectives the teacher is expecting the students to achieve for the day, accompanied by an essential question. Some of the higher-order questions that led to higher-level thinking and discussion were, "How can we derive a formula that can be used to find the sum of interior angles of regular polygons?", and "Based on your knowledge from reading the documents, discuss how the lives of the people of the ancient world were shaped by the geography of their region". These are just a few questions that engaged the students requiring them to think deeply in order to create a response. However, in a few classrooms, some of the questions were not as rich, or the students engaged in ping-pong responses directly to the teacher only, rather than engaging with their peers. The inconsistency of questioning techniques and facilitation of discussions prevents some students from engaging on a higher level, and diminishes their ability to improve their work to develop critical thinking skills.

- Continue to use the research-based teacher observation process so that feedback to teachers includes actionable next steps to improve their pedagogical practices in order to increase student outcomes. (4.1)
 - While it is commendable that teacher development is driven by a research-based framework, and clearly evident from a review of informal and formal observations that school leaders have provided effective feedback that is aligned to the competencies being developed this year, it was not evident during some class visits that the post-observation feedback provided was effectively implemented by teachers. For example, although teachers have received specific targeted next steps related to higher-order questioning, in some classes, teachers still asked very low level, recall questions, yielding minimal responses and low engagement from the students. Inconsistent implementation of recommendations for improved pedagogy hinders the rigor and engagement that all students need to participate on a higher level and increase their learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

Renaissance High School for Musical Theater & Technology					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	