

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research

**High School X332
965 Longwood Ave.
Bronx
NY 10459**

Principal: Sharif Rucker

Dates of review: April 29-30, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Holly Reichert

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research is a high school with 301 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 40% Black, 57% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 82.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school thoughtfully uses resources, time and programming to address student and teacher needs aligned with school goals focused on improving student achievement and pedagogical practice. (1.3)
 - The school's goals focus on supporting students as they accumulate the required number of credits, pass Regents examinations and graduate in four years as well as providing teachers with time to meet in teams and professional development to improve practice. The school provides students with programming aligned to their specific learning needs. For example, 9th and 10th grade students, who enter with a level 1 or 2 on the 8th grade State tests, receive additional English and math classes dedicated to strengthening basic skills. The school hired an additional English language arts teacher to teach the additional courses and to ensure the continuation of reduced class size. Math teachers receive professional development from a National Teachers' Network coach focused on a specific math strategy aimed at strengthening student mathematical reasoning. Furthermore, the school hired an additional special education teacher and doubled the number of integrated co-teaching classes to better support students with disabilities. With regard to the use of time and scheduling, class periods increased to fifty minutes and all teachers have a daily common period for team meetings and planning. Teachers meet at least twice a week in grade or curriculum teams to discuss student needs, analyze student work, and collaborate on common practices and assessments. As a result of team work, students experience challenging tasks that ask them to provide textual evidence in support of their ideas and properly cite sources. The use of Skedula, an on-line grading and student data system, allows teachers and staff to communicate about student progress with each other, students and families. All school constituents spoke how Skedula allows them to track student progress and communicate about student needs. Data to date shows increases in student progress. For example, 71% of 10th grade students passed math in January 2013 compared to 55% of 9th grade students in June 2012. Moreover, 59 % of students with disabilities passed English language arts in January 2013 compared to 41% in June 2012.
- Focused on the needs of every student, the school's mutually respectful culture promotes an environment of trust and support where students can take responsibility for their future college and career paths. (1.4)
 - Small class size and reduced teacher total student load underpin the school's approach to building a supportive environment. This allows teachers to develop close relationships with students and regularly attend to their needs. Students and parents stated that teachers provide academic and social-emotional support before, during and after school. Moreover, the students said that teachers and school staff know them well, and they feel comfortable going to many of them for help. One student added, "I feel like this school has a million guidance counselors." Students in 9th and 12th grade have an advisory class aimed at

addressing the transition into and out of high school, respectively. The collaboration of student life, guidance and attendance staff supports students who are off-track to get back and stay on track. Teachers and the guidance counselor who run the senior mentoring program co-create success contracts with students targeting areas for improvement with a set action plan. Students who struggle with attendance and credit accumulation are provided with specific, individualized interventions from the family assistant and guidance counselor centered on attendance and course scheduling. Data shows that a number of students receiving this coordinated support are making gains. For example, one student has 93% attendance to date this year compared to 47% in 2012, and she has been able to recover the credits she missed last year. Monthly town halls provide the staff and students a venue to discuss important school issues and celebrate achievements. Students said that they have a voice at town halls, adding they can approach the principal at any time. Students also commented that they are learning responsibility and important writing skills needed for life, college and careers. Stating that they receive college advisement from teachers and the guidance counselor, students shared how college readiness is addressed in classes and during special college events like workshops and trips. Each grade level focuses on important, college-ready study skills. For example, 9th grade is working on developing classroom work habits and 11th grade is honing organizational skills, such as note-taking and time management. Teachers receive professional development on these habits which are aligned with instructional expectations and school goals. After school peer tutoring and a men's mentoring program as well as Saturday test preparation classes offer students ways to take responsibility and be involved in their education and future. The school attributes its calm environment, reduction in suspensions, and increases in attendance and credit accumulation to the personal support provided by staff.

- Regular teacher team collaboration builds a collective focus on school-wide instructional goals to improve pedagogical practice that effectively addresses students' diverse learning and social-emotional needs. (4.2)
 - Teachers meet at least twice a week in grade or department curriculum teams to discuss student needs. Department curriculum teams focus on specific strategies, common rubrics and assessments. All departments developed and implemented content-specific rubrics this year. For example, the English department implemented an English reading and writing rubric. During the meeting observed, teachers used this rubric to score samples of student writing and discuss applicability of the rubric to various assignments and performance tasks. As an outcome of the meeting, teachers will focus on two elements of the rubric with their students and come back to the next meeting with data to inform the team's next steps to modify the rubric. Furthermore, the team discussed how they will adjust the rubric for each grade level so that criteria language vertically builds in complexity. Conjointly, grade level teams focus on interventions to support students who are off-track with credits and struggling with attendance. The 11th grade team uses case conferencing intervention with eleven students identified as off-track with 25-30 credits. Since implementation in March 2013, data shows 7 out the 11 students are now on track as a result of their work. To support teams, the school instituted grade level and curriculum leaders who facilitate team meetings. Minutes are taken by a team member and agendas are

created by leaders aligned to school goals and professional development with the input of team members. Teachers stated that team work has impacted their instruction and the progress of their students. One teacher cited how focusing attention on the supporting detail component of the rubric and addressing it explicitly in lessons led to student scores increasing at least one level on the rubric. Another teacher shared how his explicit focus on rubric criteria and use of a peer editing process led to better writing and increased scores on the department rubric.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase scaffolding and tailored skill-building supports in curricular plans that address the specific needs of English language learners and students with disabilities to ensure cognitive engagement and mastery of content. (1.1)
 - The school has developed curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Six staff members participated in Office of Academic Resources training to refine their CCLS-aligned units, and are waiting for feedback and follow-up from the Common Core Fellows on their second units. Curricular plans in place follow an Understanding by Design-aligned template and lesson plans follow the school's prescribed workshop model format. Math units of study show revisions that include materials and resources linked to the work being done in the math department with a math coach from the National Teaching Network to address the needs of students who struggle with mathematical thinking and problem solving. English language arts units focus on literature and companion texts that connect to the unit's theme and essential questions. All plans focus on the provision of group work, challenging content and literacy tasks. In some lesson plans reviewed, specific modifications and differentiation for English language learners and students with disabilities, such as simplified questions and peer translation, were evident. During classes visited, students were observed doing collaborative activities, and in some classes students received modified questions and sat with peers who could assist them. While the school has curricula that addresses CCLS and some lessons observed provided modifications for specific groups of students, not all curricula consistently differentiates for the learning needs of struggling students, English language learners and students with disabilities. Additionally, refinement to curricula does not show how student data is reflected in plans to specifically meet the needs of identified groups of students. As a result, the school is limited in its capacity to consistently emphasize access to rigorous habits and higher-order skills explicitly planned to engage all students.
- Strengthen teaching strategies, including scaffolding, questioning and discussion techniques that allow access into the curricula so that all learners demonstrate high-order thinking skills in student work products. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, teachers ask students content specific questions and organize instructional activities so that students have the opportunity to discuss course material with peers. Aligned with the school's belief about how students learn best, teachers plan with student interaction and collaboration in mind. Lesson plans reviewed contain group activities and, in some cases, articulate the roles students have in their collaborative group work. Additionally, the school promotes accountability

talk as a component of the workshop model. As seen in some classes, students discussed their ideas and the thinking of others in small groups and during whole class share out. In these classes, teachers asked students to consider what their classmates said and if they agreed or disagreed. While in other classes, teachers called on individual students to answer questions, and once the answer was given moved on to another question and student. Moreover, in some classes, struggling students did not engage with group members or the course content and some stated that they were waiting to get help from the teacher. While there is a school-wide focus on questioning and discussion, lesson planning to engage students in group activities and opportunities to allow students to talk with their peers, not all students have access to the curricula leading to uneven levels of participation and thinking. As a result, inconsistently utilized teaching strategies to address a diversity of learners limit the school's capacity to meet all student learning needs and to close the achievement gap.

- Deepen formative and summative assessment practices across the school so that effective, timely and appropriate instructional adjustments are made for all student groups and result in increased student performance. (2.2)
 - Teachers create rubrics, tasks and assessments to measure student learning. In math, teachers conduct unit-aligned pre-and post-assessments to determine mastery of specific, standards-based math skills. In English language arts and social studies, rubrics are used to assess writing-based performance tasks. Departments create and use rubrics based on the Common Core Learning Standards and Regents examination expectations. Praise, general comments about strengths, what could be improved and grammar and punctuation edits were seen on rubric-assessed student work samples. Feedback to students as to the next steps they need to take to move to a higher level of performance on the rubric was not evident across grades and content areas. Lesson plans reviewed stated different types of formative assessments to be conducted, including informational and process questions and exit tickets, an end of class formative assessment. During classes observed, some teachers asked specific questions to assess student understanding and a few gave exit slips. Students who had not completed work during the class time were asked if they understood the assignment and stated they did not understand. Consistent checks for understanding linked to adjustments in instruction during the class period were not evident in some of the classes visited. Students in one class stated that they did not understand or know how to do the task they were working on and were waiting for the teacher to help them. The teacher addressed the students; however, adjusted instruction to meet the students' needs was not evident. In another class, students who were working alone while others worked in groups were not sure what to do and struggled until the teacher addressed their questions. One of the students continued to struggle even after the teacher provided direction. While the school has developed rubrics and assessments aligned to their curricula to assess student learning and some teachers regularly check for understanding with questions and exit slips, formative and summative data does not consistently lead to instructional adjustments that appropriately addresses student learning. As a consequence, the school is limited in its capacity to provide all students with timely and accurate next steps that result in student mastery of content across grades.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name:	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