



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support
2013-2014**

Quality Review Report

2013-2014

Rachel Carson School for Coastal Studies

**High School 344
521 West Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11224**

Principal: Edward Wilensky

Dates of review: Dec. 3 - 4 2013

Lead Reviewer: Leslie Miller Chislett

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Rachel Carson High for Coastal Studies is high school with 512 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 22% Black, 22% Hispanic, 39% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 83.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

What the school does well

- Faculty align curricula and academic tasks to Common Core (CC) and content-area standards to build coherence across grades and subjects and refine tasks to provide diverse learners access to rigorous learning experiences. (1.1)
 - Teachers in every grade and subject area wrote unit maps during the summer and now meet regularly to integrate the CC instructional shifts in unit and lesson plans. Using a backwards design model, teachers mapped instructional outcomes that align with the CC and State standards in English language arts, science, and social studies and they determined formative and summative assessment tasks. Essential questions, key concepts, instructional strategies, and academic vocabulary, along with possible modifications for students with disabilities (SWDs) and/or English language learners (ELLs) are part of most written plans. Many units culminate with a writing project such as an essay or lab report that is assessed by a rubric. In science, social studies, and English units, there is an emphasis on varied non-fiction texts, strategies to build comprehension, and use of textual evidence to support claims in keeping with the CC instructional shifts. In ninth grade, New York State CC Algebra modules were adopted that require students to reason abstractly and quantitatively and then explain their reasoning. This work has intentionally furthered the school's emphasis on giving all student access to curricula that promotes college and career readiness.
 - Numerous data sources inform the planning of curricula and academic tasks for all students including those in the lowest third in terms of credit accrual, for English language learners (ELLs), and for students with disabilities. Analysis of scholarship reports, Achieve 3000 data, baseline math assessments, student writing, mid-term exams, and observation of student engagement with texts, revealed the need to strengthen plans and refine supports for students that struggle with comprehending academic vocabulary and summarizing complex non-fiction texts or reasoning in math. Subject-area and instructional support teachers work together in an on-going fashion to revise unit and lessons plans to build student access to the content. In addition, curricula used in Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) settings for students with disabilities reflects planning to engage the diversity of learners in thoughtful discourse and standards-aligned learning assignments ensuring access of all students to rigorous curricula.
- School leaders make organizational decisions and strategically use resources to support the school's unique vision, long-range plans, and instructional goals, to result in meaningful work products for students. (1.3)
 - The principal has skillfully optimized the use of budget, technology, coaches, and partnerships to support the school's focus on Coastal Studies and the sciences and accelerate student achievement. For example, in partnership with the New York Aquarium the school offers an activity-based freshmen orientation, and in-depth study and excursions in marine biology possible throughout the year. In collaboration with the neighboring high school, students participate on competitive sports teams. Availability and use of computer hardware, software, robotics, fish tanks, microscopes, and other science lab equipment, illustrate efforts to integrate technology with

coursework. In addition, space and funding has been procured to build a new science research center. To support struggling students, strategic planning allowed for Living Environment and Global History tutoring sessions, some blended with online learning, available before school and during the day, attended by approximately 70 % of identified students leading to their advancing their credit accrual. To build teacher capacity, consultant and network coaches are leveraged to provide feedback aligned with the Danielson framework to individuals and departments and professional support in CC-standards curriculum alignment. The result has been teachers incorporating instructional strategies like those used to assess math learning and foster student discussion, ultimately increasing the effectiveness of curricula and instruction to produce improved student outcomes.

- Hiring practices and teacher assignments have made it possible for the school to expand its electives to include science research, marine technology, forensics, film, and art courses. Thus, many students graduate with credits over the number required for a Regents diploma, and the school now offers seven Advanced Placement as well as College Now courses and the Intel research program through Kingsborough Community College, allowing one-third of the school's population to gain college credit, furthering college and career readiness for all students. Services and interventions for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are flexibly scheduled and strategically delivered. Recently hired additional special education guidance staff meet with special education and subject area teachers weekly to review student data, determine present level of performance, and hold themselves accountable for students' progress towards graduation. Consequently, students with IEPs have been moved to less restrictive environments and typically receive a Regents diploma. Classroom teachers and English as a second language (ESL) teachers also cooperatively plan and partner for instruction during subject-area classes to provide literacy supports and promote access to rigorous curricula that is aligned with the demands of the CCLS.
- School leaders and teachers maintain a positive culture of mutual respect and have structures in place that result in the academic and personal growth of students and adults. (1.4)
 - The school's approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is driven by theory of action that if students feel cared for and experience an inclusive school community committed to their success, they will achieve and make progress towards graduation regardless of their starting point. Both students and parents speak assuredly about the school's family-like culture and impact on personal well-being. Numerous parents and students explain how the school and its "loving teachers" turned their children around after having negative middle school experiences, thus allowing students to be fully invested in their own path to success. Students explain they can freely voice personal concerns or ways to improve school to the administration, guidance staff, or teachers. For example, seeing the need for expanded college access support, several outstanding upper classmen have forged active roles in assisting the college advisor in educating their peers about the college application process. As a result, according to all constituencies, personal behaviors that correlate with academic success such as motivation, self-confidence, and resiliency, are developed in students.

- Students are assigned to guidance staff who serve grade-level academies or specialize in working with students with IEPs so that they feel adults know them well and that they can easily access counselors during lunch or throughout the day to support their academic or personal needs. Information sharing between teachers, counselors, parents, and students, is facilitated by use of online systems such as iLog, SKEDULA, and Pupil Path, to build a coherent approach to student support. Additional counseling and youth development services are available through the school's onsite partner, the Young Christian Women's Association (YWCA). To tactically address student needs, grade-level faculty meet regularly in academies with instructional support services teachers to discuss struggling students on a watch list, and students and their parents attend these meetings as necessary to work together to focus on how to improve academic and personal progress. An attendance team led by the assistant principal meets to review attendance and transcripts of individual learners and concentrates on providing interventions for students at-risk for failure and those that are chronically absent. The result of these structures has been a reduction in the number of students who are chronically absent and a steadily increasing graduation rate.
- Teachers create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies, and analyze this information to adjust curricula and instruction and provide feedback to help students understand their academic progress. (2.2)
 - The school has a grading policy that is made public through the student handbook and on posters in certain classrooms. SKEDULA is used as an electronic grade book and assists teachers in aggregating assessment data to understand individual and class progress so they can provide actionable feedback to students and parents on learner progress or to adjust their instruction. Standards-aligned common assessments include written performance tasks and rubrics, baseline formative math assessments, teacher-designed mid-terms, and end-of-semester exams that help teachers and their students understand learning outcomes. These assessments are also used at the team level to make important decisions such as moving students struggling in algebra or geometry from a class that occurs over two semesters to one that is paced over three semesters, or to revise a English language arts or social studies units of instruction to improve students' use of evidence from primary and secondary sources to support claims in argumentative essays. Lexile levels yielded from Achieve 3000 reading assessments are used diagnostically to place ninth grade students or students with IEPs into instructional support services, and to inform groupings during after school tutoring or for targeted assistance in subject-area classes. As a result, teachers understand learner progress and thoughtfully involve learners while making adjustments to address student-learning needs.
 - An "action research team" consisting of special education teachers, English as a second language and subject-area teachers, meet regularly to review data from their observations of students' performance on reading assignments with complex texts, constructed-response problems involving explanations of ideas, and other writing assignments assessed by rubrics. This helps teachers to understand student progress towards CC-aligned literacy goals such as the use of academic vocabulary. Analysis revealed students struggling with comprehending directions on tests and concepts embedded in science and social studies terms. Teachers tested strategies to assist students in deconstructing words, utilizing relationships between words

to make meaning and highlighting and annotating text. The result has been progress for English language learners toward these literacy goals and greater success in subject-area assignments and exam pass rates.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the use of instructional strategies informed by the Danielson Framework and instructional shifts across classrooms so that student discussions and work products reflect high levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
 - Teachers are working to use strategies that support literacy and scaffold instruction so students can engage with challenging content. For example, in three or four of the classrooms observed teachers explicitly modeled annotation or coding of text to assist students with processing the importance of certain information. In some classes, students were given different leveled texts related to the lesson's topic. Graphic organizers to sort and analyze information from several texts, prompts for students to share their opinion and respond to the opinions of their peers, and the assignment of different roles in group work were commonly used. In ICT classes or classes such as science where the ESL teacher assisted, students were shown how to decipher words and take notes that illustrate word meanings. However, questioning often volleyed between student and teacher only, a majority of students in some classes did not contribute to the discussion, and those that responded did not often support their responses with reasoned evidence from text. While strategies derived from the Danielson Framework that link to the CC instructional shifts are emerging to foster students' engagement with standards-aligned tasks, currently across classrooms higher-order thinking skills and active participation are inconsistently demonstrated in student discussions and work products. Consequently, learning is limited for some students.
- Improve the processes leaders and teacher teams use to evaluate and adjust curricular and instructional practices and professional development to result in clarity and refinement of school-wide improvement practices with attention to the CCLS (5.1)
 - The principal and AP meet regularly to discuss pertinent daily issues, review data from numerous sources including scholarship reports and frequent observations of classrooms, and occasionally interface with lead teachers and teacher teams. However, processes to summarize and evaluate the impact of the feedback they are giving teachers or the quality of professional development options such as consultant coaching are not solidified. In addition, while teachers facilitate their own meetings and keep one another accountable for monitoring student progress, deliberate reflective routines to examine the benefits of methods used to conduct inquiry or refine curriculum are inconsistently used. Therefore, school leaders do not have a clear picture of further efforts needed for how curriculum development, instructional strategies, and professional development improvement efforts, can be adjusted to further impact student achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Rachel Carson School for Coastal Studies		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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?				X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?				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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?				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

