Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Secondary School for Journalism

High School 15K463

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BROOKLYN
NY, 11215

Principal: Jodi Radwell

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Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Secondary School for Journalism is a high school with 271 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 46% Black, 37% Hispanic, 5% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 13.7% English language learners and 20.3% special education students. Boys account for 46.5% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53.5%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 86.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Across content areas, lessons and academic tasks integrate the instructional shifts, requiring students to demonstrate learning through oral and written textual analysis, thus promoting college and career readiness. (1.1)
    - The school uses a backwards design approach to curriculum development for all courses, with a deliberate focus on the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and New York State content standards. Teachers are required to develop two Common Core aligned units and tasks each term, which are collected and reviewed using an alignment protocol to ensure they are rigorous and reflect the criteria established in the Tri-State rubric. This year's focus on improving the quality of the essential questions is evident, as units are built around significant issues such as "Should government be limited?" and "What makes me who I am and can I be changed?", with guiding questions for each lesson directed towards particular content knowledge. In mathematics, problem solving questions privilege the application of algebraic and geometric concepts in multistep procedures, and require multiple representations so students can gain an understanding of the connections between the abstract and the concrete. Graphic organizers, visuals and outlines, as well as modified tasks, support access and performance of English language learners and students with disabilities who work together with the general population. The English department complements the use of its identified core novels with the timely incorporation of non-fiction texts that provide historical context. For example, as students read Ellison's *Invisible Man*, they drew connections between the character and Ellison's own conflict with the Communist Party. Classroom tasks and more extended projects in English, social studies and science typically require students to synthesize information from multiple texts and take positions on controversial topics. For example, in Living Environment, students argued whether the interest of scientific advancement should override the right to privacy, and the divergence amongst student positions revealed a commitment to understanding the nuances in the different stances. The school's common approach to developing high quality curriculum and research-based tasks results in increasing degrees of college and career readiness.
- Teacher practices reflect the school's philosophy that students learn best when engaged in meaningful opportunities to think and write, at their instructional levels, resulting in high levels of discussion and participation. (1.2)
    - Classroom practice reflects the school's focus on pedagogical approaches that support "making thinking visible," which builds on last year's work around Danielson component 3b on questioning and discussion. Nearly all classrooms emphasize the active involvement of students in inquiry and exploration of significant themes, using structured protocols such as "silent conversations" and "ask and answer," a four-step close reading protocol, and accountable talk stems during discussions. For example, in a 10th grade English class, students annotated texts provided at different levels of complexity related to the effects of the Holocaust on subsequent generations to then summarize key information to share in a whip around with their peers. In an integrated co-teaching class on geometry, small groups engaged in

problems that required both mathematical reasoning and multistep problem solving, to compare the cost and amount of materials needed to maximize volume or to cover surface area and select an optimum solution. Students with individualized education plans were held to the same standard of mathematical thinking as their non-disabled peers, but were assigned two-step problems with “friendlier” numbers, to enable them to participate on an equal footing in the activity and the discussion. In a Global History class, students explored in writing the perspectives of Neville Chamberlain and Adolph Hitler as expressed through quotes provided in English and Spanish. This enabled English language learners sufficient time to prepare before engaging in a student-facilitated Socratic seminar related to the unit’s essential question: “How did Europe come to find itself at the door of World War II?” Classroom assignments reflect attention to diverse learning styles and choice, including the creation of posters, public service announcements and writing of children’s books so that students can demonstrate their knowledge in various ways. As a result, all students engage in appropriately challenging tasks and produce work products that reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

- School leaders support clear expectations for teacher practice through regular feedback that aligns to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and professional development that enhances teacher practice. (4.1)
    - The school participated in the Danielson pilot last year, enabling teachers and supervisors to gain familiarity with the criteria of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This year, the principal established a venue for new teachers to help them study the Framework and support their understanding of the expectations. Teachers meet with administrators at the beginning of the year and after each marking period to discuss student outcomes, including written work and item analyses from the Regents exams, and to track teacher growth in relation to the various domains of the Framework. The discussion of pedagogy constitutes a change from prior administrative practice. As one teacher said, “Under the previous administration, I went unobserved for five years.” Teachers state that as a result of supervisor feedback and professional development, their practice has become more student-centered. For example, one teacher in an integrated co-teaching partnership said they are using the “pyramid of learning” as a guiding principle, trying to promote students teaching each other as a way of deepening their learning, since when someone teaches content; one retains 90% of the material. Another teacher indicated that the provision of concrete examples and tools such as the “It says, I say, so…” template has helped her build students’ critical thinking skills. Observation feedback, which is provided in a “glow and grow” format, aligns to the school’s focus on questioning. For example, one teacher was asked to balance her recording of student answers on the iPad, which is her way of collecting formative data, with probing questions to push for greater elaboration and analysis. Another teacher was prompted to make more active use of the accountable talk stems. Classroom visits revealed the impact of the cycles of observations, as students were seen calling on each other and teachers were observed facilitating discussions, per prior feedback. A mid-year evaluation system, using data from observation reports in the ADVANCE tracking tool, resulted in the identification of teachers with highly effective practices to serve as teacher leaders and the organizing of a schedule for classroom intervisitations to generate a migration of good practice.

The purposeful use of supervisory structure has resulted in the expansion of a common set of pedagogical practices that align to the school's instructional focus on visible thinking.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish an approach to culture-building, social-emotional learning and positive personal and academic behaviors to promote a climate of trust among all constituents. (1.4)
    - Parents and students agree that the school provides a calm and orderly environment for learning, and behavioral issues rarely affect classroom instruction. However, the school is still developing its capacity to fully address students' social-emotional needs and promote student voice through systemic supports. The school has established a short weekly advisory period with a breakdown of skills and content that includes some goal setting and monitoring, which is increasing the degree to which students' needs are known and acted upon. In addition, a peer mediation program has been established, which has reduced the level of conflict and increased respect among students. Policies to address disciplinary issues, such as class cutting and chronic absenteeism are currently under discussion, but these are not linked to an overall philosophy and there is no data-based plan to work proactively to investigate the causes and potential solutions to attendance issues. The school is also in the process of improving communications through the installation of a public address system, a change that students desire. In an effort to promote recognition of positive student behaviors, students recently initiated a "like" campaign, through which faculty members can acknowledge positive academic and personal behaviors by posting commendations on a hallway bulletin board, with a view to rewarding frequent fliers. However, at present, many students feel that they do not understand some of the changes underway at the school, such as the establishment of formalized academic tracks for each cohort, and that they are insufficiently informed about the requirements for graduation. The absence of an approach to meeting the social-emotional learning and positive personal and academic behaviors reduces the levels of trust and communication within and between constituents, preventing the school from building an environment where all constituents feel welcome.
- Improve the alignment of grading policies, assessment criteria and rubrics across content areas and grades to ensure students receive consistently accurate and actionable feedback to accelerate their progress. (2.2)
    - The school has made purposeful efforts to bring coherence to its approach to assessment, starting with an assessment calendar that paces test administration, so that results accurately reflect student mastery. Across the school, teachers create assessments and rubrics that align to content, use exit tickets and "Do Nows" to assess students' understanding and adjust instruction. Teachers track student progress using a new common grading formula, where culminating assessments are valued at 40%, formative assessments at 40% and participation contributes 20% of the grade. These marks are shared with students and parents through the electronic grading platform. During the writing process, students state that they receive ongoing feedback from their teachers which helps them improve and many tasks are accompanied by task-specific rubrics. However, the school has not yet developed a

common approach to developing assessments, which students say creates confusion and some dissatisfaction. For example, some assessments are said to contain too many items (upwards of 100) for which students are not prepared so that results do not accurately reflect mastery of material that was taught. In addition, some students express that the grading criteria are not explicit and that some teachers' grade "based on personal judgment, or what they think you will do." While there are rubrics in use throughout the school, including participation rubrics where students occasionally evaluate their own class-preparedness and contributions, students state that they do not always understand the relationship of the rubric to their own work and have not been exposed to exemplars in all classes to help them fully understand the expectations. The junior institute, comprising 9th and 10th grade, is working towards implementing the use of a common grading rubric for the humanities, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards to bring greater coherence to grading policies, but these discussions are at the initial stages. Thus, although some structures are in place to support student self-reflection and independence, not all students and teachers dedicate sufficient attention to these tools to effectively increase levels of achievement, as evidenced by student work products and exam results.

- Extend the practice of collaborative inquiry across all grades so that teacher team work drives refinements in teacher practice, which results in improved student outcomes. (4.2)
    - Teachers meet weekly in grade-level teams, in addition to department leaders who also meet weekly on a curriculum team, and there are venues, such as retreats where teachers collaborate to improve teacher practice. Recognizing the need to provide a solid foundation for students' high school education and having engaged together in the scoring of a performance based assessment at the beginning of the year, the ninth grade team has worked purposefully to develop a common set of practices to support student learning across content areas. These practices include the use of a 4-step "close reading" protocol which prompts students to read for the overall theme and then annotate text and highlight unfamiliar vocabulary to then delve deeper, that is now used across the school. In addition, the team adopted a "Claim-Evidence-Interpretation" schema, as a way to build student capacity to formulate and defend arguments. These two practices have contributed to improvements in students' writing, as evidenced by student work across content areas that are shared with all teachers through students' individual Googledocs accounts. However, the 11th grade team lacked clarity about their goals and procedures, and only recently received the guidance necessary for them to conduct inquiry. They said their work had concentrated mainly on the "personal problems" of individual students. As one teacher leader explained: "We are in an incubation period, emerging from several pilots and must decide which to continue." The absence of common understandings about the inquiry process and more timely support for the facilitation of this work, limits the school in building teacher leadership capacity so that all teachers feel they have a voice in instructional decision-making.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Secondary School for Journalism	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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		

To what extent does the school...	UD	D		
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		

To what extent does the school...	UD			
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