

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Fort Hamilton High School

20K490

**8301 Shore Road
Brooklyn
NY 11209**

Principal: Kaye Houlihan

Dates of review: May 14 - 16, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusano

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Fort Hamilton is a high school with 4,238 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 5% Black, 28% Hispanic, 34% White, and 31% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 - 2014 was 91.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices with a clear focus on promoting professional growth and reflection, thereby positively impacting classroom instruction. (4.1)
 - The principal and assistant principals provide effective feedback and next steps for improvement to teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The assistant principals are assigned by department and conduct observations so that every teacher is observed and offered feedback. Together, administrators debrief the observations and use their collective evidence to prioritize support to teachers. Next steps consist of work within departmental teams, inter-visitations, partnerships with outside organizations who provide professional development and direct training from the administration. For example, one veteran teacher receives support from the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) to enhance science lesson planning. As a result of observation feedback, a new teacher was offered to conduct walkthroughs to view expert teaching practices and works with the coach and mentor to develop model lesson plans. This type of development and support provides teacher in this school an opportunity to own their development, reflect on their practice, and learn from their peers and supervisors in order to improve in their pedagogy and planning.
 - For the past two years the school has used the Danielson Framework to assess and support teacher practice and student achievement. Specifically, the goal for this school year is to help teachers achieve proficiency in questioning and discussion techniques, and engaging students in learning and using assessment in instruction. These competencies were chosen to ensure coherence within the school around components in the Danielson Framework to support teachers in Domain 3. A special emphasis was on 3b questioning and discussion techniques. For example, one veteran teacher was provided feedback to “slow the pace of the lesson to allow for students to create their own questions”. As a result of using the feedback from the assistant principal, the teacher obtained a highly effective rating in the engaging student learning component in his next observation. As a result, feedback is aligned to framework criteria articulating clear expectations for teacher practice leading to instructional adjustments and professional growth.
- The principal has made effective decisions regarding use of resources allowing for targeted supports that lead to improved student engagement with tasks. (1.3)
 - The school obtained various resources to support their targeted goals for the school year. Instructional coaches in all core subject areas were attained this year to support staff with new initiatives such as Newsela.com and the Hochman writing program. The purchasing of laptops for the library provides students with ongoing access to the Internet to work on their research projects. The school has established strong partnerships with professional organizations such as the Joffrey Ballet, the Kingsborough College Now program, and Math for America, a not-for-profit organization. These programs provide students with ongoing access to outside organizations which support instructional activities which infuse the focus of the school. For example, while observing the Joffrey Ballet class, students self-reflected on their needs as ballerinas to determine how they wanted the teacher to support them

during class which is one of the school's core beliefs that children should be provided opportunities for assessment of their own practices. Through this program, students have access to professional performers, rigorous curricula, theatre art experience, and flexible opportunities to obtain credits in the arts, and dance. As a result of these partnerships and use of resources, students are demonstrating growth in work products as evidenced in school wide learning tasks.

- The school offers a highly structured student schedule in order to support the academics and its performing arts program. Interventions are programmed in the morning and afternoon to provide students with tutoring in core subject areas. In addition, the school offers a Saturday academy for tutoring as well. English as a second language (ESL) classes are sectioned by state mandated requirements, however, the additional ESL class provides both advanced and proficient ELL students with language acquisition support. Additionally, the school offers a credit recovery program built into the yearly program to support students with remediation and enrichment. Furthermore, when hiring and matching teachers and students, hiring committee members consider the teacher's strengths, former classroom experiences and licensing to inform their programming decisions. As a result of these programming decisions, interventions, and teacher placement, students have equal access to learning opportunities and demonstrate growth in tasks that lead to college and career readiness.
- The school has a shared commitment to provide strategic and ongoing support structures for students and outreach to parents of students' progress resulting in effective academic and social behaviors. (1.4)
 - The school has structures in place to ensure that students are supported and known well and that all academic and guidance services are focused on strengthening the already established positive culture. A "House Structure" design ensures a smaller student learning community composed of an assistant principal and a team which supervise and support each of the nine houses. Moreover, guidance counselors conduct case conferences with families and students on an individual basis and in consultation with staff members, hone in on matters of concern, such as long-term absence which is also monitored via an online data system that informs the decisions for home visits. For further support, a team of staff members also meet twice per month to review cases of cutting, tardiness and student absence, to monitor progress and develop solutions to the problem of ongoing chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, the school utilizes a "family systems approach" to provide families with information on external organizations serving the community with added support to improve students' academic and personal growth by affording parents links to outside organizations, such as Center for Family Life for those in need of help working with their children at home to improve academic and personal behaviors through therapy. Likewise, the "Project Success" team is accountable for attendance and in-school absence, home communication and visits, directly communicating and engaging parental input. Also, ongoing monitoring of marking period scholarship reports and behavior files lead to increased efforts in supporting student achievement. As a result of these strategic endeavors by school staff and leaders, students are motivated and eager to attend school as evidenced by a 91.7% student attendance.

- The administration, faculty, and staff learn new methods of interventions and create opportunities for students to acquire learning experiences that promote social responsibility and healthy behaviors. Guidance counselors train teachers and staff on discipline measures and “Respect for All” anti-bullying protocols during the school year. Moreover, a new counselor who has experience working with students at the school on Rikers Island has provided professional development on Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT). These strategies are being used by all guidance counselors in dealing with students who have been suspended. In addition, in efforts to promote responsibility and leadership, students are encouraged to participate in Student Government and the Leadership class, which provide a focus on increasing leadership skills while promoting civic responsibility. Furthermore, family outreach through the guidance department and using online grading programs provide parents with ongoing awareness of their child’s academic progress. Parents reported that the use of the online grading system, “...is helpful to see how my student is doing on his tests and view his absences.” The combination of strategic staff development, family and student programming and outreach demonstrates the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors as evidenced in classroom visitations.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine curricula and tasks to fully integrate the instructional shifts and provide access to rigorous learning opportunities in order to meet the needs of diverse learners. (1.1)
 - School leaders and staff are in the process of developing curriculum maps and lesson plans to fully integrate the CCLS and instructional shifts in all subject areas. Currently, staff members utilize modules from sites such as Engage NY and AMaps as well as other supplemental resources from the New York State Department of Education. Lesson plans reflect planning to provide exposure to learning tasks that lead students to rigorous thinking especially in ELA and Social studies. However, the school has yet to fully adapt all curriculum materials to reflect the instructional shifts into all school-wide instructional maps. For example, a review of curriculum materials in science and certain areas in math, across grades, such as unit of study maps and corresponding lesson plans provided by staff members, demonstrate lack of full alignment and integration of higher order learning tasks reflective of the instructional shifts. Further evidence provided by the school administration, after the review was completed, continued to show a lack of consistency across grades and subject areas. Therefore, the school’s ability to provide coherent rigorous instruction in all classrooms is hindered.
 - Some lesson plans reflect strategies to provide students access to learning tasks. Within these planned activities include the use of mixed level grouping for language and learning purposes, and scaffold questioning strategies. However, the school’s curricula and lesson plans are not fully refined to reflect full access for diverse learners across subject areas. For example, a review of many social studies lesson plans indicated, “Differentiated activities throughout the lesson, in depth analysis of the application” for teachers to utilize in order to provide diverse learners access to rigorous learning tasks. Some also indicated “grouping by mixed levels” as another means of

differentiation. As a result of the absence in the refinement of units, not all students have access to the curricula and tasks, thus hampering opportunities for all students to be engaged in rigorous work.

- Strengthen teaching strategies that embed multiple entry points so that academic tasks challenge all learners resulting in work products that reflect high levels of engagement. (1.2)
 - Classroom practices are beginning to formulate a set of pedagogical beliefs around grouping students in mixed-level groups. Many of the classes visited emphasized student groups and encouragement of students' active involvement in the class lesson. For example, in one class, students were placed in mixed-leveled groups to engage in work with multi-level texts leading to the development of ideas to understand historical events. The teacher provided meaningful support to groups of students in the class by providing insights into the best places to capture evidence to support their claim about the character. However, teaching practices to support struggling students were not consistently evident across classrooms, which led to uneven levels of engagement. For example, in one English classroom, students were provided questions that did not push students' thinking. In other classes which contained English language learners and students with disabilities tasks were of low demand and provided little room for in-depth written responses to tasks. As a result, teaching practices do not allow entry points for all students to consistently engage in productive struggle thus impeding their ability to fully demonstrate higher order thinking skills for specific learning tasks.
 - Across classrooms, students were grouped for discussion, demonstrating evidence of implementing instruction aligned to the school-wide goals. In a variety of classes, students were grouped for different academic tasks, such as to find solutions, learn about literary techniques, and/or solve equations. In one science class, the majority of the students were engaged in discussion about radioactive materials in small groups which reflected high levels of rigorous thinking. However, this was not a common practice across classrooms. In several classes, some students were engaged in thoughtful conversations and others were not. Although grouping was a prevalent practice, the amount of student discussion within each class did not consistently reflect high levels of thinking and participation, thus impeding the intellectual engagement of students in cementing their learning.
- Improve the work of teachers in using assessment tools to monitor student progress in order to provide actionable feedback and adjust instructional practices so that all students' learning needs are effectively met. (2.2)
 - Some school-wide assessments are aligned with key standards and curricula especially in ELA and social studies. There is a consistent use of rubrics that are task-specific to assess student performance and provide comments relative to student work, especially in writing. For example, in one writing task, a teacher provided feedback that complimented the student's efforts and provided constructive comments such as, "You need a more detailed and developed discussion" and, "You are missing a topic sentence in which you state the theme.", to highlight areas in need of improvement. However, the practices of providing actionable feedback was not consistent across classrooms as evidenced in student work folders and bulletin boards, thus hindering the ability for students to utilize the responses in an effective manner to improve their achievement across all subject areas.

- As part of the school's instructional focus, teachers are growing in their efforts to use formative assessments as checkpoints for understanding to determine the student's needs based on verbal and written responses. In some lesson plans, teachers indicate key activities as checks for understanding. However, there was not enough evidence to support that these assessment practices were implemented or documented across classrooms so that teachers can make timely and effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs. Although across classrooms, teachers used low level questions to gauge some idea of students' conceptual understanding; few efforts were made to alter instruction using formative assessments. In addition, evidence of self-assessment was uneven across classrooms. The lack of consistent ongoing checks for understanding and self-assessment results in insufficient adjustments to meet the diverse needs of all learners, thus hampering students' ability to fully engage in effective ownership of their own learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Fort Hamilton	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