

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School**

**High School K659**

**999 Jamaica Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11208**

**Principal: Amy Yager**

**Dates of review: May 7 - 8, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School is a high school with 370 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 16% Black, 72% Hispanic, 5% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 81.6%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's curricula are Common Core aligned and coherently provide opportunities that result in higher order thinking for all students. (1.1)
  - Last year, the principal and assistant principals researched Common Core aligned curricula to identify resources that would be the foundation of this year's standards-based instruction. They purchased the College Board's Springboard curricula for both English language arts and math for all four grades. They also utilize City University of New York's (CUNY) At Home curriculum to inform English language arts and math instruction for seniors. With their concentration on reading and writing throughout all subject areas, there is a focus on using text-based evidence to support the argumentative writing. This was evident in planning documents in subjects such as pre-calculus, advanced placement government, United States and global history. Academic tasks, particularly culminating assignments at the end of units, consistently emphasized rigor and higher order skills. Such tasks included students having to: produce a persuasive argument for a school board validating the need for trigonometry in the school's curricula, analyze eco-systems from the perspectives of botanists, zoologists and meteorologists; analyze the role of congress; and choose between writing an analytical essay about a character's development over the course of a narrative or a persuasive essay regarding robbing someone of their dignity. In all cases, English language learners and special education students were expected to complete the same challenging assignments as their general education peers. The school's adoption of an established Common Core aligned curriculum to serve as a basis for coherent instruction, along with the purposeful focus on using text-based evidence to support reading and writing across grades and subjects, allows students to have access to rigorous learning experiences, thus fostering career and college readiness for all students.
- The school allocates its financial and human resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning, resulting in meaningful student work products. (1.3)
  - With the significant funding that came with a School Improvement Grant, the school's leadership made a number of thoughtful decisions to support school goals. To increase credit accumulation and overall academic success, per session money was set aside to compensate staff who provide instructional support outside of the scheduled school week including: Standardized Achievement Test (SAT) prep, credit recovery courses, Regents review and after school tutoring in all four core content areas. To increase student engagement, iPads were purchased for all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, three additional laptop carts were acquired, and accounts for online instructional support programs such as Achieve 3000, Brain Pop and Rosetta Stone were purchased. In addition, the school has already purchased high interest English language arts texts for next year. To facilitate this year's focus on annotation as a strategy to gather text-based evidence for arguments, document cameras were purchased for all classrooms. Lastly, money has been allocated to support professional

development so that English Language Arts, math and designated special education and English as second language (ESL) teachers were able to attend training on the implementation of the new Springboard curricula. The result of these investments are an increase in student close reading of text, and an increase in the number of graduating seniors on track to earn an Advance Regents diploma from 1 (last year) to 15.

- School leadership has purposefully provided teachers with time and structures to collaborate on improving their instructional practices. Fourth period has been designated as the school's primary weekly professional collaboration time, where specific days are allocated for specific types of meetings depending on whether teachers chose common planning, data or Individualized Education Program (IEP) work as their professional period. Given the three options, the types of team meetings that teachers engage in include: data, curriculum maps, content, student work, grade and IEP. Regardless of the selection, all teams operate based on protocols and follow an inquiry approach. In addition, the whole staff occurs weekly at the end of the day on Mondays. This time is used for a number of purposes, including as an opportunity for teams to share their work with the entire staff. At times, these staff wide gatherings are structured professional development sessions lead by the presenting team. The school benefited from this purposeful use of time as evidenced by the increase in usefulness and quality of IEPs, increased access to student data trends, and coherence in the implementation of instructional practices geared toward the use of text evidence to support arguments.
- All teachers are members of at least one strategically focused inquiry-based professional collaboration that results in improved teacher practice and progress toward increased student achievement. (4.2)
  - All teachers engage in weekly professional collaborations focused on data, curriculum maps, content, student work, grade or IEP work. The math team was observed looking at student data of a targeted heterogeneous group of students. The data was from a writing performance task through the English language arts lens of counter-claims as well as language and conventions. They found that though students continued to struggle with articulating the counter-claim, most had shown growth, but were not yet proficient in their use of language and conventions as measured by the argumentative rubric. Next steps included the use sentence starters and emphasis on details. The Looking at Student Work Team followed a protocol that had the presenting teacher describe the task, and colleagues make observations, interpret from the students' perspectives, discuss implications and next steps for instruction, and then have the presenter reflect on the input received. Specific suggestions made to improve practice included: modeling pre-writing and varying scaffolding amongst groups more strategically. All teachers who were asked were able to cite an example of how the structure and processes embedded in these professional collaborations push both their individual and collective pedagogical practices.

## What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that instruction consistently provides multiple entry points into the curricula so all students can think and participate at high levels. (1.2)
  - Grouping and the use of graphic organizers to chunk student thinking were evidenced throughout most of the classes observed. As a result, the vast majority of students were on task. However, though there were tasks that promoted rigor, the strategies used did not consistently require students to think or participate at high levels. For example, in one class, there were very clear roles defined within each group, but there were students who did not understand how their role was to inform the manner in which they engaged in the research task. In another class, when a student was not clear on how to start the graphic organizer designed to have them do a close reading of a text, the teacher was observed doing the work for the student in the vein of support. Similarly, during a science class, a teacher was observed providing a student with an answer when all of the information that the student needed was in front of him in the form of text and illustrations. In addition, some of the student-to-student tasks required low levels of thinking, such as fact sharing, sharing prior knowledge, identifying details and classifying information. Though practices are in place to get students to engage and “do”, these practices are not consistently used to promote rigorous thinking and participation across classes.
- Deepen assessment practices across classrooms so that ongoing checks for understanding result in effective instructional adjustments, and students are provided with actionable feedback that increases their mastery. (2.2)
  - Throughout classrooms, teachers circulated to support students and groups as they engaged in assigned tasks. However, there was only one instance during the course of instruction where a teacher purposefully checked for understanding in a way that yielded class-wide understanding of an aspect of the lesson, yet the teacher did not make any noticeable adjustments to instruction to address those who needed support. When providing verbal feedback, teachers were heard offering clear next steps to support students’ thought processes, yet the majority of student work reviewed in student portfolios were either ungraded or only contained checks or numerical scores. Student work that did contain actionable feedback, including some found on display on bulletin boards that included comments such as, “Good use of a happy voice and sad voice. Use more details to make the voices stronger” and “thesis should be the last sentence of the intro.” Furthermore, while discussing work products with students the presence of actionable feedback was also inconsistent. They included: an assignment where the student earned a 90 out of 100, with no feedback on how the remaining 10 points could have been earned; a math assignment that only had “no effort” written at the top, two art pieces that were not accompanied by a rubric or grade, and Scranton graded, multiple choice tasks that only had scores on them. In addition, there was a lab and two argumentative essays that did have feedback that outlined next steps toward improvement. Two students stated that though there were no comments on their quizzes, the teacher goes over the problems that students get wrong after returning them in class. When asked what that verbal feedback entailed, they could not recall the

specifics, but said at the time of receiving the verbal feedback, they understood. Such inconsistencies in providing students with actionable feedback as well as using checks for understanding to inform timely instructional adjustments limits both student and teacher ability to use actionable feedback to improve teaching and learning.

- Revise culture building practices and develop both professional development and student learning experiences that promote effective academic and personal behaviors amongst all students. (1.4)
  - The school has implemented strategies to build school culture. Outward Bound has provided programming to increase student engagement. Student government has pushed for more advanced placement classes, and extracurricular activities such as the cricket and cooking clubs are in existence because of the initiative of invested student voice. However, both students and staff noted that there are respect and safety concerns within their community. There has been an increase in the number of principal suspensions as compared to last year, from 47 to 68. Also, the number of superintendent suspensions was 5 at this point last year. This year the number is up to 14. The school leadership is keenly aware of the challenges they face in improving the school's overall culture and named a number of thoughtful measures as developing practices including: school social workers conducting staff trainings in de-escalation, transitioning crisis intervention practices from Response to Intervention (RTI) to Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), creating a student-friendly discipline code, and revisiting the school's core values. Given that these plans have yet to gain a hold in the community, there are limited opportunities to support the academic and personal growth of all students.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Cypress Hills Collegiate School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>