

Quality Review Report

2013-2014

Community Health Academy of the Heights

High School M346

**504 WEST 158TH STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10032**

Principal: Mark House

Dates of review: Nov 12 - 13, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Community Health Academy of the Heights is a high School with 551 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 5% Black, 93% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 34% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 86.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Administrators and teachers have purposefully designed curriculum and academic tasks that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and emphasize the development of analytic and critical thinking skills for all learners. (1.1)
 - Teachers, coaches, and administrators, engaged in focused time during the summer of 2013, analyzing the current curriculum as well as revising the design of units of study and lesson templates in order to ensure alignment to the Citywide Instructional Expectations and the instructional shifts of the Common Core Learning Standards. The templates, which are used school wide and shared electronically by teachers, include essential questions, content vocabulary, higher order questions, assessments, and scaffolds for a variety of learners. Key standards in reading comprehension across the curriculum were chosen to address the large numbers of students who are reading below proficiency. Units of study aligned to content area standards take into account the progression of learning from one grade to the next. This year, student learning in each unit of study is evaluated with a CCLS aligned performance task, which serves as a common assessment for each grade. Teachers create lessons within the unit to progressively build students' skills and content knowledge and promote mastery at the end of the unit. As a result, there is school wide integration of CCLS expectations into the design of lessons and academic tasks that promote higher order thinking and cognitive engagement.
- The principal effectively uses the school's budget, partnerships, and hiring processes, to ensure supports for student learning and increase access to opportunities for students to prepare for college and careers. (1.3)
 - Scheduling and budget decisions that support the school's literacy initiatives allow for English language arts classes to be extended from 60 minutes to 75 minutes in order to include sufficient time for independent reading time and individual reading conferences for students. Additionally, the principal hired a full time librarian and purchased a variety of texts and resources to support the school's goal to increase student performance in literacy. In order to address the specific reading needs of the large number of English language learners and students with disabilities, the principal has hired more special education and English as second language teachers and paired these specialists with content area teachers on each grade. This additional support for students allows teachers to meet students' diverse learning needs. The school's partnership with Community League of the Heights, CLOTH, is also strategically aligned so that the after school program provides one hour of tutoring in focused academic areas prior to non-academic activities. School funds are used for teachers to provide tutoring on Saturdays as well. College and community partnerships also provide opportunities for college visits and provide resources and information to prepare students for the college application process including scholarship applications, internships, and orientation to careers. As a result there is school wide support of prioritized goals, student academic progress in coursework, and credit accumulation towards and beyond graduation.
- Teachers and teacher teams use data from common assessments and CCLS aligned performance tasks across content areas to make adjustments to instruction and meet the individualized needs of diverse learners. (2.2)

- Grade level and content area teams use protocols for looking at student work to determine trends in student needs and also discuss the implications for necessary adjustments to curriculum and teaching strategies. Teachers use rubrics to assess work based on CCLS and task specific objectives. For example, a science team found that students were able to answer questions orally but could not express their process in writing as required in CCLS aligned tasks. Thus, teachers adjusted tasks and scaffolds for students to produce argument driven, evidence based responses that include rationale for answers. In order to support struggling readers, teachers look for resources on Achieve 3000 that provide content-based text on various reading levels. Thus, all students have access to the same task with various texts. Across content areas, teachers use results from baseline assessments and monthly practice State tests to determine content mastery and determine topics for review. For example, an English language arts team decided to norm the language of their lessons on claims and counterclaims so that students will recognize the same terms in other subjects. They also decided to include more exemplars and provide students with checklists for self-assessments prior to finalizing their essays. These thoughtful decisions to make curricular and instructional adjustments result in targeted supports to meet the needs of students and improve progress towards grade and content standards.
- Teachers collaborate effectively on grade level and content area teams to make key decisions based on the analysis of student work that results in improved results for groups of students and influence learning across the school. (4.2)
 - Teachers meet two to three times a month, formally in content and grade level teams and use consistent protocols that guide their inquiry approach to analysis of student work. Each team leader ensures that the agenda and instructional work for meetings focus on school wide goals of increasing student mastery across content areas. Across the school for example, teachers have determined that many students struggle with reading comprehension and that in all lessons teachers must emphasize specific skills across content areas. For example in grades 6 through 12, the vertical science team identifies strategies for scaffolding academic language as the school has a large number of current and former English language learners. A careful analysis of student work revealed that student understanding and use of content language in their writing was minimal. As teachers identified strategies, such as annotation, summarizing, and paraphrasing, these were shared across the school with team leaders who in turn took the information back to grade level teams, in order to implement supports across the school and embed them in other content areas. The use of shared documents via the school's website creates multiple opportunities for informal meetings and discussions. Other decisions by teacher teams include the gradual release of responsibility resulting in decrease in teacher-dominated lessons across grades and more time on task for students. As a result, teachers are demonstrating improved skills in facilitating learning as evidenced by self-reflections on practice and administrators' feedback from observations of lessons. Teachers state they see a positive difference in the level of perseverance of students when trying to solve problems on their own. One ninth grade class has increased pass rates on practice State exams from 30% to 70%. Additionally, the focus on reading comprehension skills has resulted in increased lexile scores for middle school students including English language learners and students with disabilities as evidenced by monthly online assessment reports.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase consistency of teaching practices across grades and subjects so that the lessons reflect the school's beliefs and discussions require students to engage in higher order thinking.(1.2)
 - Teachers and administrators articulate a common belief that students learn best when they are practitioners of the content. Thus, as expressed by the principal and teachers, it is expected that lessons will be hands-on, relevant and engaging. This is evident in some classrooms, for example, as in a Spanish class where students used claims and counterclaims to advocate on behalf of agriculturists, veterinarians, and Colombian government officials. In an English class, teams debated capital punishment by using structured debate protocols after having researched text presenting both sides of the issue. In another lesson, students participated in a Socratic seminar to analyze an argumentative text on using animals for chemical testing. These high-level discussions and relevant topics provide context for critical analysis and discussion. However, in other classrooms, pacing of lessons and student understanding are not carefully monitored, thus students who are finished with a task must wait for further direction from the teacher. In some cases in which students were unclear as to the steps in the task, they were not redirected and therefore completed the task incorrectly. This inconsistency of supports and extensions creates uneven levels of thinking and participation for students across classrooms.
- Prioritize feedback to teachers from classroom observations so that expectations for pedagogical improvements and next steps are clear and promote teacher development. (4.1)
 - Administrators and staff have transitioned from a prior rubric to the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the evaluation system for teacher development and support. To date, each teacher has been assigned a coach, either an administrator or a lead teacher, for one-to-one support. Teachers meet with their coaches on a bi-weekly basis to discuss lessons, their students, and their progress in the Danielson competencies. All teachers completed a self-evaluation at the beginning of the year using the Danielson framework and have been observed at least twice in mini-observation and feedback cycles. Administrators provide teachers with feedback either via email, verbal feedback in reflection conferences, and/or checklists indicating the level of performance on the observed competencies. A review of the feedback indicates that some teachers receive feedback that captures areas for further improvement that is aligned to the framework. However, some feedback is only loosely connected to the competencies and does not always articulate clear expectations for next steps to improve practice. Some recommendations are about procedural routines or management of time, while others are about contacting parents. Consequently, this inconsistency of setting and identifying feedback priorities within the system for supporting teacher development hinders necessary pedagogical improvements school wide.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Community Health Academy of the Heights	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
----------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	----------------------------