

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Wadleigh Secondary School for the
Performing & Visual Arts**

Middle-High School 415

**215 WEST 114th STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10026**

Principal: Tye Chin

**Dates of review: Feb 25 - 26, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing & Visual Arts is a Middle- High school with 531 students from grades 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 55% Black, 43% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 32% of the students enrolled and girls account for 68%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 81.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal deliberately aligns the use of resources including the budget and teacher meeting time with school goals, resulting in structures that support professional collaboration focused on the improvement of instruction. (1.3)
 - The school budget is prioritized to provide textbooks, instructional supplies and the increasing use of technology school wide. The computer lab is now used as a resource room, where students work on projects and assignments. Additionally, the school principal has recently purchased hand-held response devices or “clickers” for students’ ongoing engagement in lessons, thus supporting teachers in conducting a quick assessment of student learning. Funds have also been prioritized to automate and upgrade the school library, increase teacher and student use of the web-based program, Achieve 3000, to improve students’ reading and writing skills, and Math XL for focused attention on improving math performance. These supports align to the schools’ prioritized goals for improving student achievement and supporting preparation for college and careers. Teacher schedules have also been organized to align with the goals. Weekly common meeting times for subject area and grade level teams allow teachers to collaborate around instructional and curricular decisions, review student work, and discuss social emotional needs of individual students. Teachers also state they meet frequently on an informal basis to discuss and share best practices. As a result of the multiple opportunities, teachers have during the week and after school, teachers are able to identify performance trends or gaps across grades and content areas and collaborate to improve the quality of lessons and academic tasks. Thus, the administration’s priorities support the movement towards school’s goals of strengthening teacher practice and student learning.
- The administration effectively uses data from frequent observations of instruction to provide actionable feedback and clear expectations for improved pedagogy, thus supporting teacher development. (4.1)
 - During weekly meetings, administrators engage in discussions about observations and norm their ratings on the various Danielson Framework competencies prior to entering any information into the online teacher evaluation system. The principal states that this process increases coherence around instructional expectations across the school especially in the areas of questioning, facilitating higher order thinking, and student discussion. Furthermore, a review of observation reports revealed that administrators use a common template for documenting evidence of teacher-student interactions, student engagement, and levels of questioning within lessons. Specifically, commendations and next steps in most observation reports focus on teachers’ use of pivotal questions in their lessons to determine instructional next steps, aligning feedback to a school wide priority of fostering student thinking, and providing meaningful feedback to teachers about areas of strength and those needing improvement based on levels of practice on the Danielson rubric. For example, observation feedback refers to specific levels of questions and engagement of students in discussion. For lessons that reflect minimal effectiveness, recommendations for professional development and strategies for improvement are delineated by the principal and assistant principals. Teachers state that specific recommendations by administrators on how to improve the use of pivotal questions have

resulted in thoughtful planning and inclusion of these questions in daily lessons. Administrators analyze observation notes and use identified trends to develop professional learning opportunities and explicit clear next steps for individual teachers, including one-to-one meetings with administrators, coaches, or lead teachers, to focus on particular instructional strategies. This process has led to individual reflection on practice and is strengthening teacher development across the school.

- Across grades and subjects, teachers engage in structured collaborative inquiry and analysis of student performance, thus leading to strengthened instructional practice. (4.2)
 - Teachers participated in the School Based Option voting process and collaborated with the principal to create additional team meeting time for common planning by departments. Twice a month, teachers use this time to review units of study, discuss lessons and Common Core Learning Standard (CCLS) alignment. All teachers also meet with grade level colleagues once a week to discuss patterns of performance for students they share and brainstorm potential strategies to meet their identified needs in the different content areas. A unique team, formed early this school year, comprises an instructional coach and teachers from each grade, representative of all content areas. At their meeting, teachers were observed reviewing data from first semester course passing rates and discussing potential causes of the large percentage of students in ninth grade struggling in one or more courses. Some of the items discussed included difficulties adjusting to high school workload, fluctuating attendance patterns, and social and family issues potentially influencing student progress. The team has also identified small cohorts of students that each member supports through an inquiry process incorporating frequent meetings and check-ins with students and progress monitoring based on class grades, tests, and homework. These structures have also enabled the emergence of teacher leadership as department leads and grade level leads meet with the principal and assistant principals to share their noticings and create action plans to address areas of concern across the school. The frequent opportunities teachers have for discussion of problems of practice, analysis of student data, and designing solutions, has increased coherence and shared accountability amongst staff for attainment of the school's overall goals of improved progress and increased proficiency. Teachers also state that as a result of these collaborations they are increasingly focused on how they can best support student learning in their classrooms.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the process of refining Common Core aligned curriculum across all content areas and grades so that academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and provide supports to cognitively engage diverse learners. (1.1)
 - The administration and faculty have spent considerable time over the past few years revising curriculum to align the scope and sequence of units of study in each content area to the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards. A review of artifacts indicates that across subjects and grades there are guiding essential questions, performance objectives, prioritized standards, and samples of tasks for the assessment of student learning within units of study. In some cases a unit includes essential questions that emphasize deep thinking such as, "Is it necessary to sacrifice individual freedom for the good of the community?" followed by objectives

linked to assessment of student learning of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Social Contract. However, there is insufficient evidence of the type of academic task that will allow students to demonstrate this higher order thinking. In a current unit of study on Black History, the essential question, "Is the school system still segregated?" is being explored school wide. However, the guidance for the 30-day unit reflects minimal interdisciplinary connections. For example for grade 9 social studies, skills include reading and citing from evidence with vocabulary that only consists of the word segregation. Furthermore, lesson plans reflect that only some teachers use a template that guides them through a well-organized rationale from selecting objectives and asking pivotal questions, and across subjects, there is minimal evidence of how lessons or units are modified to address the diverse needs of students including struggling readers, English language learners, and special education students. As a result, the curriculum and lessons do not consistently engage student in higher order tasks or critical thinking.

- Improve the alignment between pedagogical practices and the school's core beliefs about how students learn best so that lessons engage students in discussions and tasks that promote higher order thinking and participation. (1.2)
 - The principal and teachers agree that student engagement and active participation in discussion promote student learning. Specifically, the principal articulates that the expectation for every lesson is that students should be talking to one another, discovering new content, and answering meaningful questions as teachers circulate the room to check for understanding and facilitate discussions. To support the embracing of these core beliefs, teachers have participated in professional development on questioning and discussion techniques over the past two years. Observation of classroom lessons revealed that there are some teachers that have developed a culture for learning in which students are confident giving peer feedback and analyzing one another's work. For example in a visual arts lesson, students commented on their peer's rendering of Escher's drawing, "Hand holding a Reflective Sphere". The discussion included content language and analysis of perspective. Presenting students received feedback well and provided their rationale for their techniques and use of light to portray their work. Similarly, in an English language arts class, students worked in groups to discuss their classmate's essay on segregation offered a firm stance to introduce an argument. These classes reflect the school's core beliefs and expectations about how students learn best. However, most lessons observed were teacher directed with minimal discussion or participation by students. In some classes, students did not have clear direction about what to do next and were therefore, sitting idly while the rest of the students worked on a project. The inconsistencies in student engagement and participation in higher order learning activities result in many missed opportunities to accelerate student learning across grades and content areas.
- Strengthen assessment practices school wide so that teachers use data about student progress and consistently check for understanding to make timely, effective instructional adjustments that meet the needs of all learners. (2.2)
 - Teachers review a variety of data sources to discuss patterns of success and needs across grades and content areas and brainstorm ideas for how to support student learning. The discussions by the teacher teams observed indicate that course passing rates, attendance, and scores on common

assessments, including content area mid-term assessments, inform priorities for teacher work. For example, the academic force team discussed the large number of ninth graders that failed one or more classes in the first semester. The social studies team discussed the poor attendance patterns of many students and how they might strategize differently to encourage consistent attendance by students since this was at the core of their poor performance. However, the discussion about student performance and progress was very general and did not lead to instructional strategies related to skill development or deeper conceptual understanding to increase proficiency in the content area. Additionally, classroom level assessments were inconsistent across classrooms. Although one math lesson included the use of focused questions and clarification of misconceptions in solving algebraic problems, most classes consisted of general, whole group, low-level questions that did not extend students response or provide teachers with sufficient information to make necessary instructional adjustments. The school has some emerging assessment practices that are beginning to surface patterns of need amongst small cohorts of students and this work is beginning to influence how teachers work with these students. However, across classrooms and grades, assessment practices relative to all students' needs are not yet consistent, thus limiting teachers' having sufficient information to make effective adjustments to curriculum and pedagogy.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing & Visual Arts	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