

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Queens School of Inquiry**

**25Q252**

**158-40 76<sup>th</sup> Road**

**Queens**

**NY 11366**

**Principal: Meredith Inbal**

**Dates of review: April 8-9, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Queens School of Inquiry is a middle/high school with 590 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 16% Black, 25% Hispanic, 18% White, and 39% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.9%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- All stakeholders establish a culture of high expectations, building strong support for college and career readiness and engaging students and families in partnerships that prepare students for the next level. (3.4)
  - Parents emphatically state that their reason for choosing this high school is the school's college-going mindset and opportunities for students to accumulate several college credits. The parent coordinator is highly valued by parents as the link between home and school. They claim that her knowledge of every student and her "finger on the pulse of what kids need" afford them full support when resolving concerns. Workshops and meetings presented by the parent coordinator or literacy coach keep parents informed of the expectations of the standards-based curricula and the school's transition to a standards-based grading system. One parent noted that her child is "doing complex work in the classrooms." Moreover, parents feel that they are treated as true partners because school leaders have an open-door policy and all teachers are accessible via email, Haiku, phone, or face-to-face. Haiku Learning, a digital platform, allows parents to monitor their children's progress, while course syllabi help them in understanding course expectations and steps needed for their children to meet those expectations. They are well informed about requirements for credit accumulation, including college credits and course choices that are very often individualized for students, to increase their chances for success. Guidance counselors take a hands-on approach to support parent/student decision-making. One parent shared that her daughter wanted to be a nurse and the counselor, while on the phone, accessed information, on-line, regarding colleges that offer nursing programs. These relationships with parents result in strong home-school connections that support students' progress towards college and career readiness.
  - Teacher teams and school leaders share a unified set of high expectations that is driven by the school's mission that "all students can and will go to college early and successfully complete their path toward higher education." To this end, all students are expected to develop independence and self-advocacy so that they are well prepared to be successful in college. Beginning with a summer program, guidance counselors are aggressive in supporting students from grade 6, assisting them in becoming acclimated to middle school and the college mindset, all the way to grade 12, with course choices, transcript management, college choices, and applications. College preparatory programs, facilitated and taught by the high school faculty, commence in June with seventh grade students spending one week and eighth grade students spending two weeks on the Queens College (QC) campus, completing mini-college classes of their choice, such as American Sign Language and Psychology for grade 7, and a college writing course and a study skills course for grade 8. Many juniors and seniors travel to the campus every day to begin their credit-bearing coursework and have a true college experience. The QSI/QC partnership offered 20 students the opportunity to earn college credit in history while studying in Paris and the school launched its first Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Nest cohort this year, to accommodate local elementary school Nest programs so that these students can participate in rich learning experiences through standards-based work, with scaffolds that allow them to meet course expectations. All students are exposed to a variety of career paths, during Career

Days, with professionals such as an orthodontist, attorneys, and law enforcement agents discussing career expectations so that students can aspire to and make career choices in high school. Alumni share their college experiences and point to the school's college immersion program as having had great influence in their decision to stay at QSI for high school, and in helping them to be college ready. These experiences help all students to develop an understanding of college expectations, with the impact of this college-going school culture evident in college acceptance data, which show that all members of this year's 2014 cohort of students have already received multiple college acceptance letters thus far.

- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions that support instructional goals and action plans, through a collaborative model that involves all staff in planning and implementing learning experiences that improve student outcomes. (1.3)
  - QSI is a QC Partner School so the principal makes all budgetary and capacity-building decisions with the school's primary goal in mind: to provide all students with the opportunity to go to college early and succeed. Through the partnership with QC, students can accumulate up to 62 college credits before graduating from high school. The principal uses City University of New York (CUNY) grant monies to support a group of middle school English and history teachers to develop Common Core-aligned units and track students' improvement in literacy development. The grant also sponsored a Video Learning Community in fall, 2013, where select teachers collectively analyzed and reflected on practices to improve student achievement. Through an Urban Advantage partnership, science teachers receive ongoing professional development to promote inquiry-based classroom instruction. Middle school teachers benefited from six tuition-free graduate credits through a partnership with Hunter College which exposes them to non-negotiable teaching practices introduced as part of this year's ASD Nest model. Further, to support a dean-free school, the principal funds three guidance counselors and there is a literacy coach who helps to strengthen the school's college-going culture. As a result, progress towards goal attainment is evident in the school's most recent credit accumulation data showing 92.2% average credits earned, of average credits attempted by the 2014 cohort of seniors.
  - The principal recently launched an eight weeks night school program, in lieu of summer school, as an option for seniors who need to make up missed credits and middle school students who need make up work in order to meet promotion criteria. The coursework allows students to re-learn content not yet mastered and/or practice for a Regents exam. Additionally, the principal's vision is exemplified in a student-centered master schedule built around student needs and school goal-setting. For example, based on scholarship data, guidance counselors, in conference with students and families, develop individualized course schedules with interim goals that are reviewed in September, January, and May. Lab periods are also built into middle school subject schedules to provide additional seat time for students to achieve mastery through "re-teach" and "re-take" of assessments. Teachers are carefully recruited for Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes with a low teacher/student ratio in a least restrictive environment, in an effort to close the achievement gap. The principal purposefully converts many student teachers to full time hires, as they are already familiar with the school's culture and instructional practices. For example, the entire math department consists of former student teachers. Also, the principal in collaboration with staff, selected teachers to launch the ASD Nest Program and holds them accountable for their students' progress. As a result, all students continue to make progress towards instructional goals, as evident in student work reviewed.

- Instructional coherence across grades and subject areas is reflected in Common Core aligned curricula that emphasize rigorous tasks for all learners. (1.1)
  - According to the principal, the faculty has studied, piloted and practiced backward design for several years. Thus in the last three years, the school shifted its curricula maps to align to Common Core standards and key instructional shifts and content, as desired results in each unit so that, currently, all content curricula are fully aligned. This is coupled with participation in a CUNY grant that resulted in the writing of units anchored in literacy development tasks across subjects and grades. Unit templates include detailed maps of three stages of design: Desired Results; Assessment Evidence; Learning Activities/Resources, thus contributing to planning backward from QC pre-requisites for core college coursework. All units are guided by essential questions and transfer goals and include modifications that address specific needs, including vocabulary development. Coherence across grades and subjects is evident across units through literacy based content and strategies aligned to instructional shifts such as close reading, argument writing using text-based evidence, and course-specific text complexity. Further, college courses are offered to all students, commencing with Spanish in grade 9. An Engineering and Design course, also offered in grade 9, provides students with practice in skills needed for their success in college. Co-curricular courses such as drama and art further reinforce those skills. Several syllabi include a path to accumulate college credit and Regents credit. As a result of this rigorous course pathway, the current college readiness data shows that the 2014 student cohort is on track for final credit accumulation ranging from 8 to 48 college credits.
  - Units of study and lesson plans incorporate rigorous tasks across grades. Day-to-day and unit performance-based tasks are thoughtfully planned, using backward design from college pre-requisites. Students have an opportunity to demonstrate their thinking through academic tasks referred to as “Learning Menus”, which consist of different learning activities to assess content understanding, while improving literacy skills. For example, in a history unit the menu includes, but is not limited to, graphic organizers, persuasive speeches, postcards, travel brochures, websites, timelines, eulogies, magazine articles and diary entries. Similar to a restaurant menu, students have an opportunity to choose an appetizer task, an entrée task, and a dessert task for their leveled learning menu. Once they demonstrate mastery of the tasks they are able to advance out of the section. Menu tasks are modified according to the needs of students so that all learners have access to demanding curricula and tasks. Furthermore, menus are planned and refined using ongoing evaluation of student work and data so that all students have access to cognitively engaging curricula in all grades and content areas.
- School leaders engage in feedback loops that encompass classroom observation data and analysis of learning outcomes that strategically promote professional growth and reflection by all teachers. (4.1)
  - School leaders maintain a wall chart displaying the number of completed formal and informal observations, including who is observing which teachers, to ensure continuity of feedback and next steps across observations. They calibrate their expectations while visiting classrooms together, using the Danielson Framework to assess all competencies. Both principal and assistant principal observe ICT classes together, focusing deeply on each teacher in the room, and at times, observe all teachers in one department in one week and then provide individual and department feedback to surface gaps in teaching. Both verbal and written

feedback are detailed, consistent, actionable, and precise, highlighting next steps, especially for competencies rated as “developing”. For example, in one observation report the principal commented on the need for students to develop the skills to engage in conversations and apply what they learn in math and English to science. Comments such as, “They need opportunities to engage in scaffolded discussions and write about what they learn and how it can be applied”, and “Advanced learners need extension work, creation of projects, and ways to apply advanced level math...not giving them additional problems.” convey equally specific next steps for improving the teacher’s practice. During observation conferences administrators also refer to student work and previous evaluator notes to ensure clarity of expectations for teacher growth. For instance, one teacher was reminded that the previous evaluator suggested specific videos, websites and staff to support, “your development of a rigorous and differentiated lesson delivery.” During feedback sessions, teachers are also encouraged to seek support from a literacy coach who is an integral part of the feedback loop. The coach supports individual teachers with action steps and reflection on and revisions of their Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, Time-bound (SMART) goals. These strategic and collaborative endeavors allow administrators and selected teacher peers to provide meaningful feedback to all teachers, in alignment to their goals, resulting in their improved levels of effectiveness across domains evaluated by observations to date, as evidenced by Advance data.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen assessment practices to incorporate feedback loops that enable all teachers and students to accurately determine levels of progress toward goals, resulting in instructional adjustments to improve achievement by all students. (2.2)
  - The school transitioned this year to a standards-integrated grading system captured in Haiku Learning, a digital platform that manages assignments, monitors progress across unit assessments and homework in real-time and captures individualized data on assigned tasks in web-based programs such as Castle Learning. The platform informs all stakeholders of students’ progress towards mastery of literacy standards in all subjects and grades. In collaboration with CUNY the school created and administers the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CAT-W), an assessment in argumentative writing, in September and January in all grades. However, this assessment does not benchmark proficiency in reading, especially for some middle school students who are struggling with coursework. Therefore, teachers do not have granular feedback about students’ skill deficits in order to revise teaching strategies accordingly, especially for students reading below their grade level. Further, teachers create various versions of rubrics to match tasks but in some instances, the rubric used to assess a given task is not applicable to that task. For example, the rubric used to assess argument writing by some students was actually a rubric designed to assess proficiency in informational or explanatory writing. Thus some students interviewed about their work could not consistently identify the type of writing they had engaged in and were confused by the feedback on the rubric, resulting in limited understanding of what they do well and how they can improve. Moreover, some teachers provide detailed feedback about writing skills and content, while others provide feedback that fails to address writing deficits displayed in the students’ work. As a result, assessment practices do not consistently yield accurate feedback about students’ performance, nor do they typically lead to effective data driven adjustments to curricula and instruction, so students miss additional opportunities to achieve at high levels across subjects.

- Strengthen professional collaborations to ensure that teams engage in inquiry-based action research, in order to continue to improve student progress and teacher practice across grades and subject areas. (4.2)
  - Structured professional collaboration is a priority this year, with teachers meeting in different configurations during common planning time scheduled for team work each week. Middle school teams follow the Nest case conferencing protocol, providing next steps to support individual students, as observed during a 7th grade team meeting. High school subject teams, facilitated by department chairs, align assessments and maps to Common Core expectations. They also manage the use of the new grading system. At the English department meeting teachers recognized the need to re-visit the various rubrics that individual teachers create or adapt to “fit” their units of study assessments. Their focus was: “How do we streamline the way we grade writing tasks so students see consistent language that aligns with the Common Core standards?” However, individual teams do not consistently engage in action research as a process of inquiry to assist and inform pedagogical moves that are data-driven. For example, during the 7th grade case-conferencing meeting, teachers shared noticings regarding a student’s work behavior and task completion in their classroom. They concluded that he is always in a rush and is better at math and science, than social studies and English. However, no data was offered to analyze skill deficits, such as in comprehension, to leverage explicit, informed action via instructional strategies to improve this student’s academic performance. This hampers the cyclical process of continuous refinement of teacher practice and limits the progress of students who are not reading at grade level, especially in the middle school.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Queens School of Inquiry	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			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>