NYC **Department of Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Report

2013-2014

Queens High School for Information, Research, and Technology

High School Q302

8-21 Bay 25th Street
Queens
NY, 11691

Principal: Magaly Hicks

Dates of review: March 11-12, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Charles Simic

Information about the school

Queens High School for Information, Research, and Technology is a high school with 322 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 54% Black, 39% Hispanic, 3% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 82.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

What the school does well

- The principal makes informed programmatic decisions that align budget and resources to improve teacher practice and developing opportunities for students to meet college and career readiness benchmarks. (1.3)

  o To increase the use of technology, the school has purchased interactive white boards for teacher and student use in the classroom. Currently, this technology is primarily used for teacher presentations; however more varied uses are being adopted for instruction. Teachers receive professional development from consultants in how to use the white boards to increase student engagement. In addition, teacher leaders have been identified to help staff learn how to use the technology fully. At the time of the visit, teachers were using the white boards to project presentations or worksheets, providing visual entry points into aspects of the lesson. To support the development of more rigorous and engaging curricula, the English, math and social studies teachers work with three coaches to plan and revise instruction that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Evidence from this work can be found in curriculum maps and lesson planning documents that contain learning standards connected to the CCLS. Students report that the recent purchase of 18 computers has provided a much needed upgrade to the school's dedicated computer room. Additional technology purchases and the use of consultants to develop teachers' ability to use them effectively result in students being provided with more engaging instruction.

  o Revisions to students' schedules have allowed them to have additional opportunities for credit accumulation, meeting Regents' requirements and attaining college and career readiness. Ninth grade students are programed into double periods of math and English language arts classes to address student needs with more intense and coherent instruction. Pre-advanced placement (AP) and advanced placement classes are available to students across grade levels based on Regents results and include mid-year reprogramming as students take January exams, in turn, creating timely program changes that respond to changing student needs. Examples of student work in pre-advanced placement and advanced placement classes show attention to close reading strategies, a college readiness skill. Through this focused support, students can take Regents examinations early and are provided courses that meet their needs. Parents communicate that the CISCO certification courses that are available to students to earn valuable technology skills is a much welcomed addition to the schools course offerings. Recent hires of a community assistant, technology teacher, English and math teachers support the school in meeting student needs and improving the academic performance of many students. Hiring practices include finding candidates with the help of the school's partnership with New Visions and sometimes include a demonstration lesson using an observation tool grounded in the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Spanish speaking parents communicate that the recently hired community assistant has increased the outreach and support they experience at the school and appreciate the letters and phone calls home they have received in Spanish. English language learners are supported with a push in support model and newly created English as a Second Language class taught by a certified foreign language teacher whom is currently working toward ESL certification. The purposeful

assignment of recently hired teachers and support staff have resulted in greater supports for students and parents.

- School leaders and staff purposefully maintain a safe, inclusive culture where families and students experience high levels of support which fosters an environment of learning and respect. (1.4)

  o The school has developed a culture that responds to the social/emotional needs of students by providing multiple pathways for students to be more involved in school. Students have a greater involvement at the school due to ten different after school clubs and new and varied courses that are offered. Students stated that they find experiences that they have in before and after-school classes, as well as in a new partnership with a video production company to be supportive and engaging. Students are empowered to create clubs and additional courses are offered to students that maintain positive behavior in the school. Minutes from School Leadership Team meetings show dedicated sections for students concerns and updates. Students and parents stated that they appreciate the administration's open door policy as well as the staff's willingness to provide extra assistance to students and attribute the school's respectful culture to the attentive "family" atmosphere that has been established. Parents and students describe teachers as being responsive to their needs, giving them additional support when needed, answering questions in a timely manner, and being there for them whenever they show-up for help. Students communicate that they feel respected by teachers. Furthermore, the principal has made the school a SAT test center as a way for the school to be a greater community resource. As a result, parents and students report that their ideas are valued and that they contribute in a meaningful way towards creating a positive and welcoming school culture.

  o Strategies, such as student conferencing, are implemented to promote student social/emotional growth as well as ensure that they feel known and nurtured while in school. In addition, teachers effectively involve and inform parents regarding school events and initiatives by reaching out via phone, email and in person. Teachers use a referral system to identify and support struggling students through guidance interventions. Attendance support is offered through phone calls that are made daily to parents when students are absent and home visits that are made when students continue to be absent from school. Consequently, highly targeted, personalized supports for students and parents have helped to increase student attendance rates by 6.4% when comparing this school year to last school year. In addition, OORS data shows decreases in reported incidents. For example, in May of 2013, there were a total of 21 incidents, with at least one at every infraction level. In May of 2014, there was only one incident reported (a level 4). The schools commitment to maintaining systems and structures that cultivate trust, support and safety have resulted in a culture that promotes the growth in student academic and personal behaviors.

- The majority of teachers at the school are engaged in frequent teacher team collaborations to improve instructional practice and promote student progress resulting in shared practice and greater teacher leadership skills. (4.2)

  o Teachers engage in professional team meetings focused on sharing practices to meet the needs of struggling students. Binders and minutes are created by participants to capture instructional decisions that are made and used for teacher reflection. These binders are also reviewed by administration to identify progress and ways to support the work of

teams. A conscious effort has been made to bring student scholarship and exam data into the practice as this work is refined. During one team meeting, teachers were engaged in the refinement of an instructional hook aimed at increasing student interest in learning about the expansiveness of the British Empire. Teachers shared interpretations of student work and generated ideas to use during planning and instruction to increase student engagement. This data was used to generate trends among students including English language learners, special education students or the lowest performing students. Conversations yielded future questions that teachers could use with all students to increase student interest around the topic. Consequently, some students are beginning to be provided with refined tasks as evidenced by teachers identifying and sharing strategies to use during instruction to support struggling learners.

- o Frequent teacher team meetings build capacity, strengthen teacher leadership, and provide a structure to hear teacher voice. Systems are in place so that teachers learn how to run more effective team meetings using agendas and student work. An assistant principal and teacher leader facilitate the work done by teachers as units are refined to increase alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers share suggestions for supporting struggling students through conversations between students' former teachers and current teachers. During one teacher team meeting, teachers shared that the decision to use direct teaching strategies was made by the team after an item analysis of a past Regents examination results revealed that student performance was impeded by students' lack of specific content knowledge. As a result of teacher team meetings and structures, teachers are able to engage in important decisions that affect student learning across classrooms.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the work of curriculum development to incorporate Common Core Instructional Shifts and refine tasks so that they effectively increase levels of rigor while addressing the diverse needs of learners within the school. (1.1)

  - o Curricula and lesson activities are beginning to align to the CCLS and be informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In reviewing curricular documents, Common Core Learning Standards, content and literary practices were evident in unit and lesson plans but were present without coherent tasks embedded to teach these shifts. For example, both living environment and integrated algebra planning documents lacked student activities that would engage students in tasks to learn the targeted standards. In these plans, tasks called on students to complete worksheets without use of higher order thinking skills. Consequently, instructional planning documents that are fully aligned to the common core are not evident across the school thus limiting student access to rigorous learning experiences.

  - o Curricula and lesson plans do not show evidence of refinement using student work and data when planning for students with diverse learning needs. Consequently, these documents do not consistently reflect the needs of all learners including English language learners, special education students and high performing students. For example, curriculum maps frequently include details for supports and performance tasks aligned to the CCLS; however in lesson plans, learning activities

do not demonstrate the use of strategies to engage all students in high level tasks that promote critical thinking, which hindered meaningful engagement. The lack of using student work to inform planning impedes differentiation for diverse learners and inhibits the school from fully promoting college and career readiness skills for all students.

- Ensure that teaching practice reflect the effective inclusion of multiple entry points that lead to increased engagement for all learners. (1.2)

  - In each class observed, identical instruction and materials were provided to students throughout the lesson. Strategic supports for high-level learners, English language learners, former Ells or special education students, were not evident across classrooms to encourage high levels of participation. In only a few classrooms did teachers provide students with multiple entry points such as scaffolded activities. For example, teachers frequently asked low level questions and had students work independently for the majority of class time. In the majority of classrooms, teachers use the teacher-centered, lecture format of instruction. Most instruction had students working on the same task, producing one correct answer. As a result of the uneven levels of active student engagement, not all students are given opportunities to think and participate at higher levels of thinking, that yields meaningful discussions and work products.

  - Students in some classrooms engage in tasks that challenge them to provide evidence to support a claim, read text closely, and work in groups to construct meanings. In an AP Literature class, students watched video and read Shakespeare's Hamlet as they analyzed character actions to develop a greater understanding of the author's development of theme. In a 9th grade English language arts class, students collected textual evidence from a poem, with the aid of a teacher created graphic organizer, as they developed claims describing the author's intent in using various poetic tools such as repetition and rhythm. However, not all students are engaged with tasks that require them to think critically. In a living environment class, after students answered Regents questions, the teacher reviewed and explained which answer was correct and why. In a 9th grade integrated algebra class, students came to the front of the class to write answers to polynomial multiplication problems. Students wrote their answers without steps and returned to their seats without input from the teacher or peers as to the correctness of their answers. This inconsistency in instructional practice does not allow all students to engage in challenging activities and produce high-level work that prepares them for college and post-secondary careers.

- Improve assessment practices so that they identify trends and patterns across sub-groups and provide targeted feedback to students that can be used to inform instructional decisions and meet the needs of all learners. (2.2)

  - A school-wide grading policy is communicated in school handbooks and in classrooms so that students and parents understand the evaluation process. However, common assessments are not used to provide feedback to students regarding specific strengths and areas in need of improvement. Rubrics are infrequently provided to students before an assignment and are used with minimal feedback to students lacking specific, actionable steps a student can use to improve. Frequently, graded work in student folders and displayed in classrooms provided feedback in the form of checks or percentage correct and non-specific comments from the teacher such as, "Good Job" or "Nice Work."

Students interviewed were unable to identify specific, skill related changes they could make to improve their work. Assessment and feedback practices limit teacher and student understanding of next steps, resulting in missed opportunities to promote student's ownership of their learning process and teachers' ability to make data based instructional adjustments.

o   In one classroom visited, a mini-assessment asking students to write a two to three paragraph response to questions about characterization was used to measure student understanding, providing the teacher with the ability to determine whether students are on-track to attaining goals. In the majority of classrooms visited, teachers provided instruction without the use of whole class assessment activities. In addition, classroom ongoing checks for understanding or student self-assessment, to enable teachers to make instructional adjustments in their questioning, assignments and directions in order to meet the learning needs for a wide variety of learners were not evident. As a result, teachers are missing opportunities to gather data to inform revisions to instruction aimed at meeting the diverse meeting needs of all students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Queens High School for Information, Research, and Technology	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly…	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

To what extent does the school …	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

To what extent does the school …	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