



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

Quality Review  
Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning  
2013-2014

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Richmond Hill**

**High School 475**

**89-30 114<sup>th</sup> Street**

**Queens**

**NY 11418**

**Principal: Neil Ganesh**

**Dates of review: March 19-21, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Flavia Puello-Perdomo**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Richmond Hill High School is a high school with 2,213 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 15% Black, 47% Hispanic, 4% White, 2% American Indian, and 32% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 79.60%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has fostered consistent instructional practices across classrooms, embedding the school's beliefs related to student learning, resulting in high levels of student thinking and participation. (1.2)
  - Across the classrooms, teachers share a set of beliefs about how students learn. The principal explained that teachers are expected to create multiple entry points to support student engagement and provide students with an opportunity to actively participate in the lesson, regardless of performance abilities. During all classroom visits, teachers had an agenda describing the procedures for the lesson, as well as the essential questions. One of the English teachers explained that they use similar essential questions in the department in order to develop curricular connections across grades. Additionally, all teachers use the Smartboard to display visuals, review the lesson objectives and discuss the content and skills being taught throughout the lesson. Currently, there is an emphasis on Danielson (3b), Using questioning and discussing techniques to engage all learners and increase student participation in discussions. As a result of this, teachers scaffold their questions and use questions to guide the class discussion. For example, the focus question for a Global history lesson: "How did the Enlightenment transform monarchs into Enlightened Despots?" and the exit question for a U.S. History lesson: "Why were the Roaring Twenties both a good and bad time for African Americans?" prompted higher order thinking, as demonstrated by students' oral responses and written work. Teachers also focus on infusing literacy across the content areas. During class visits, students were observed annotating text and teachers closed their lessons by asking students to summarize their learning or complete exit slips at the end of class. Through these instructional practices, students receive academic support to accelerate their learning and improve the quality of their work products.
- The principal has made strategic organizational decisions in order to align resources to the school's goals and these decisions have led to positive outcomes for all learners. (1.3)
  - The principal creatively aligns available resources to support school improvement goals, with a focus on maximizing student achievement. For instance, every classroom is equipped with a Smartboard and teachers use new Ipads to infuse technology across content areas. Achieve 3000 was purchased to support English Language Learners and 250 Apex licenses were purchased to allow students to take online courses to fulfill previously failed graduation requirements. The school developed a partnership with the National Academy Foundation (NAF), which supports the Business and Finance as well as the Forensics and Health Sciences Academy. Combined, these programs offer a rigorous curriculum and a technical career track. The principal stated that he has tried to enhance instructional materials so that students have the resources that they need to be successful. As a result of these decisions, time on task is optimized

for staff and students, with improved student work, attendance and course pass rate for the fall semester.

- Strategic scheduling allows teachers to meet at least twice weekly, by content or grade level, to support the implementation of the teacher evaluation process and develop Common-Core aligned curriculum across the grades. In addition, the school leader re-structured the school schedule into a single session model in order to provide time for teachers to meet during common planning time and for the entire faculty to come together to share practices that foster student learning and school wide improvement. In previous years, the multi-session schedule created challenges around school wide coordination and collaboration. The current schedule provides an opportunity for teacher teams to meet more frequently and to support the school's goal of improving student achievement and attendance. For instance, an inquiry team is supporting the "Are You Green?" campaign that targets students who are not meeting graduation requirements and the target attendance rate. A team exists to monitor students' attendance and develop interventions for students with many absences and lateness. During grade level meetings, teachers use protocols to analyze student work, identify gaps, and share best practices. For example, during the 9<sup>th</sup> grade team meeting, teachers described that they were focusing on supporting students in using textual evidence to improve their writing. The teachers reviewed students' drafts to determine students' levels of proficiency on this skill, with the presenting teacher sharing the "Topics, Re-state and Illustrate" (TRI) strategy, used to help students organize their essays. As a result of these collaborations, instructional strategies are closely aligned to instructional goals in order to engage all students in challenging tasks.
- The school leader's communication about high expectations and the availability of supports result in strong partnerships between administration, teachers and parents, which improve students' academic achievement. (3.4)
  - School leaders indicated that community expectations for graduation, credit accumulation, and students' personal behavior are aligned to the current school goals. For instance, the school has initiated a "Go Green Campaign" to help students keep track of their credit accumulation, exam completion and attendance. The school posts attendance and academic results in a central location so that students and families can have easy access to data on current student performance and are able to monitor their progress. In addition, the work of the Health Services and Business and Finance Pathways inquiry team is aligned with the "Go Green Campaign", so team members meet with students to review their attendance, discuss their current performance and come up with a plan to promote improvements as needed for each student. Students who were interviewed stated that this campaign helps them to stay on track and were proud to be wearing their green buttons to show that they are currently on target with their grade level requirements. One student stated, "If you are struggling with a class you can always go to your counselor, but you also get support after school. All of your teachers are available during after school." Students explained that their counselors seek them out more frequently this year, to review credits and go over the report cards. Students also say that the online grading system helps them monitor their class progress. Students in the lowest third of the school are automatically programmed to receive mandated instructional support after

school. The school also identified 132 seniors in need of improvement and developed the "Adopt a Senior Initiative." Each of these students is supported by a volunteer staff member who helps them stay on track and get closer to the graduation goal. The school is currently piloting the College Summit Program to support upper-class students with college and career readiness. Through this program, students are able to familiarize themselves with the college application, writing the college essay and personal statement, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In addition, the school's partnership with NAF targets the goal of developing Career and Technical Education (CTE) accreditation for all students in the Business and Finance and Forensics and Health Sciences Academies. Parents also expressed that the school is supporting their children to meet college and career readiness expectations. As a result of these expectations, there is a current shift in terms of the culture and achievement, as evidenced by an 8% increase for students passing the math Regents exam in January 2014 and course pass rates which have increased between one and two percent across content areas, thus accelerating credit accumulation for students.

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

- Continue to develop vertical and horizontal curricular alignment to Common Core Standards so that all learners are consistently engaged in rigorous tasks that foster critical-thinking, thus promoting postsecondary readiness. (1.1)
  - According to the principal, curriculum alignment towards Common Core standards started two years ago when the school partnered with *High Schools that Work*. Through this collaboration, the school provided professional development to support teachers in integrating literacy strategies across the content areas and structured time for teachers to develop unit modules that include rigorous performance tasks. For instance, in earth science, teachers developed a module with a culminating argumentative essay on global warming. The math department is using the modules and resources available via Engage New York. The Business and Finance Academy and Forensics and Health Sciences Academy received curriculum support from NAF around developing tasks that are rigorous and career oriented to support students in the CTE track. For instance, a class assignment for students in the Virtual Enterprise program required them to develop a marketing company with a campaign to advertise their services. The school focused on Danielson Domain 1 during the first semester so there is an emphasis on making sure that the learning outcomes of the lesson are clear in lesson plans and unit maps. The introduction of common assessments so that teachers can have a process for identifying trends and making curriculum adjustments, is also helping to align curriculum across the school. The administrative team said that they have been dividing their curriculum maps by units in order to improve rigor and have indicated that this has been successful. However, some tasks did not require students to extend their thinking or make connections to previous learning and some students expressed that they had previously learned the material being covered in some classes so tasks are often easy to complete. As a result, not all students, including ELL and SWDs, are consistently being challenged by curricula and tasks that promote college and career readiness.

- Ensure that common assessments conducted in academic courses are used to help inform teacher practice, adjust curriculum, and promote student reflection, thereby improving student outcomes in all classrooms. (2.2)
  - The school recently implemented common assessments across subject areas and there is a school wide grading policy. The data specialist analyzes and disseminates information for use with and by teacher teams. The principal shared that they analyze assessment data in order to identify trends, determine curriculum gaps and make appropriate adjustments; however, different content areas are at different trajectories in analyzing the data and implementing instructional adjustments, based on feedback from the assessments. For instance, science teachers have administered a common assessment for several years and use the information from this assessment to break down the unit of studies by key ideas. The recent science mid-term revealed that students had difficulty with reading comprehension and with the key idea of homeostasis and dynamic equilibrium, while for the math assessment students had difficulty with word problems and justifying their responses. However, it is not clear which instructional adjustments were made as a result of student performance on these assessments. Further, although the school has initiated a process to guide curriculum refinement based on assessment data, it is still in the developing phase with regard to purposeful adjustments to curriculum and instruction. In addition, student work found in folders and posted in rooms reflected inconsistent feedback practices and during classroom visits and in the meeting with students, some students, including English language learners, had difficulty explaining steps that they needed to take to improve their work, based on teacher feedback. This lack of a systematic approach to the assessment of student learning hinders teachers' ability to make timely adjustments to curriculum and instruction in order to address all students' learning needs.
  
- Continue to develop monitoring systems to ensure rigorous instruction across all classrooms and high quality professional development for all staff so that all students achieve mastery of CCLS goals. (5.1)
  - Weekly common planning meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on the curricula they have designed and look at student work to assess challenges and determine adjustments needed. Additionally, frequent classroom observations by the administrative team, as well as reflections of the school's cabinet, allow for additional opportunities to evaluate and adjust assessment, grading practices, curriculum and instruction, to meet the demands of Common Core standards and support the diverse learning needs of all students. However, it is not clear that there are specific protocols in place for teachers to receive feedback around their curriculum maps, and it was not evident that the school is using a research based rubric or protocol to assess curriculum alignment to CCLS and overall curriculum implementation. Further, although teachers are involved in an inquiry group to improve students' academic outcomes, protocols to share team findings on an ongoing basis are less formalized. This limits teachers' capacity to fully evaluate students' varied learning needs and make purposeful data informed decisions on implementing new instructional approaches that maximize students' achievement across content areas.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Richmond Hill High	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		<b>X</b>					
<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?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?		<b>X</b>					
<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?			<b>X</b>				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			<b>X</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		<b>X</b>					
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?		<b>X</b>					
<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>