

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Hillcrest High School**

**28Q505**

**160-05 Highland Avenue  
Jamaica, Queens  
NY 11432**

**Principal: David Morrison**

**Dates of review: May 13-15, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Hillcrest High School is a large school that houses 8 Small Learning Communities, with 3,057 students from 9<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The school population comprises 33% Black, 24% Hispanic, 3% White, 39% Asian, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 88%.

### Overall Evaluation

**The school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's curricula are Common Core aligned with a focus on integrating the instructional shifts resulting in coherence across grades and subjects that promote college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
  - Planning documents show that there is a school wide commitment to embedding Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) as well as text based argumentative and inquiry based writing skills across the curricula. There is a focus in increasing rigor of what students know and do by adapting planned units of study. The tenth grade inquiry team is focusing on improving writing skills for upcoming global history and the English language arts (ELA) Regents exam by assessing student's baseline skills and how to adjust the new cycle as provided by student work evidence. Math curricula is aligned with the Common Core shifts through inquiry teams work, such as the Trigonometry Team working with selected students to ensure passing grades on Regents exams by doing an analysis of student's recent work and helping students show work for math problems in clear, labeled and accurately worded/annotated steps. The US History inquiry team works with seniors to examine their work and analyze Regents thematic essays to create outlines that assist student completion with evidence-based information. This strategic planning and inquiry results in coherence within and across subject areas thus promoting career and college ready learning experiences for all students. There are curriculum maps for all core content areas that are aligned to the CCLS and the teacher teams, along with each Small Learning Community director is engaged in planning lessons, and identifying areas that require further adjustments for English language learners and special education students. For example, teachers were working on chunking reading or breaking up complex texts into smaller units to reinforce comprehension and promote higher order thinking skills. As part of planning the writing activities are connected to standards and incorporated into units of study requiring students to write opinion pieces on topics supporting a point of view with reasons and information. This was evident in a 12<sup>th</sup> grade English class where students were having an academic discussion on Papa's Waltz that exhibited all perspectives through the critical lens of the 'Reader-Response' theory about the poem. Teachers were releasing ownership to students through peer to peer questioning and using Socratic seminar as a basis for creating differing points of view. This led to a next step quick write and reflection. Therefore students participate in a rich, coherent curriculum and rigorous performance-based tasks that enable all students to demonstrate their thinking as evident in student work products.
- Teaching strategies across the vast majority of classrooms reflect a unified belief informed by Danielson framework thus strategically providing multiple entry points and high levels of engagement for all learners. (1.2)
  - With a school-wide focus on domain 3B, questioning and discussion, the school believes that students' learn best when they are engaged in meaningful work designed to build critical thinking skills allowing for productive struggle. Across classrooms, students were using graphic organizers, manipulatives, and in addition, purposeful groupings including elbow-partners, providing multiple entry points into the curricular for all learners. Students engage in text-based discussions, solve multi-step math problems and share explanations using

reasons and evidence. Teachers were varying approaches for student's different learning styles. For instance, a co-teaching global history class asked small groups to "identify qualities that made Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Phillip II and Louis XIV absolute monarchs." Conferring and citing specifics were emphasized as useful methods of exploration. Strategic scaffolds and high quality lesson extensions to push thinking and broaden the learning experiences of all students are present. Teacher questions are thoughtfully open-ended which facilitates responses and there is an expectation for students to deepen their thinking by way of questioning each other or building upon comments made by others. Through professional development on Danielson's Framework for Teaching provided by New Visions for Public Schools on a weekly basis teachers are promoting a shared understanding of thinking that is being taught across the vast majority of classrooms. In a US History class the students were asked to examine articles on the Korean and Vietnam War and determine "If the costs outweighed the benefits". Academic vocabulary was examined, the articles were annotated and there was a whole class discussion and use of turn and talk to engage all students. Other questions posed by the students: "Do we force democracy on other countries?" "Should peace be compared to monies spent?" thus exhibiting higher order thinking activities. Learning activities observed across classrooms included writing an introduction to an argumentative research paper, extracting evidence from historical text to support a perspective, and applying scientific concepts to community service. As a result, these teaching strategies support the needs of all students to engage in appropriately challenging tasks and have resulted in an increase in Regents pass rates, and in graduation rates for students with disabilities, as noted in the school having a 25% higher rate than New York City average.

- School leaders and teacher teams and staff constantly convey high expectations that support a culture of learning so that students achieve success in career readiness and college preparation. (3.4)
  - A passionate hard working new principal communicates high and clear expectations to students, staff and parents, which motivate the school community and sets a course for continuous progress. Despite its large student population, Hillcrest High School has developed several resources into strengthening and maintaining a culture that supports high expectations for all students. Students stated that the school assists them in college selection and many claimed that they are also learning skills from courses that could earn them competitive jobs by the time they graduate. Many students have internships and students are offered the opportunity to take online exams that result in becoming certified in several subject areas leading to career and or college readiness. Teachers of Tomorrow SLC take part in their Foundations of Teaching internship co-teaching in an inclusive classroom in local elementary schools. In the Technology SLC, students receive extra training on Goggle Presentations by informed professionals. There is an active job shadowing program in partnership with Junior Achievement where students receive community service hours for authentic service based on a learning experience. Students with Disabilities have their own Guidance Counselor and work with Transition Coordinators to define career paths and goals. Most Special Education students are in inclusion classes, which allow them to grow and develop their skills, both academic and socio-emotional, alongside general education students. Parents stated that their children are not only succeeding, but excelling and would: "rather be in school learning than at home – even when sick". The Student-Parent Handbook motto for the school is: weLEARN...weChange...weSUCCEED. The Parent Teacher Association and School Leadership Team meet regularly and are well attended

by parents who are true partners in their children's education. Students, teachers, administrators and parents stated:” It is expected that our children “do well, graduate and go on to college or the next level of our achievement”. The school has a iZone Senior Academy that provides online courses for all the Small Learning Communities (SLC) to extend opportunities to juniors and seniors who are lacking in credits they need to graduate...this is supported through the guidance office and the College Now Program. The school is mindful about creating a culture of academic excellence and a desire to maintain a community of learners and leaders that apply to each of the small learning communities, thus students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

- The strategic use of resources promotes organizational decisions that clearly support the schools instructional goals to constantly improve student learning outcomes and academic performance and teacher practice. (1.3)
  - Strategies, time, money, and professional development are aligned in service of improving teaching practice and student learning. The school aligns its resources to support common meeting time for teachers, directors and assistant principals, effective teacher assignment and the integration and extension of the use of technology. Through the use of common planning time, Teacher teams meet three times a week to collaborate and effectively assess student learning needs and design coherent instruction that encourages student self-reflection and engagement of student in their academic performance. Furthermore, the establishment of the teach inquiry teams, meeting weekly, to discuss and analyze curriculum and scholarships, results in an increased focus on student needs and in developing plans to address those needs based on data and student products. The principal has purposefully established and maintained a number of valuable partnerships that provide students with college and career readiness. New Visions works with the College Now program as well as the recent past principal of the school, to ensure connections to finding both after school and summer paid internships that are opportunities for students to gain real world job experience. The iZone Senior Academy support students in credit recuperation and the school has invested in an on-line learning technology based program. As a result there has been an increase in credit accumulation for the first semester, as compared to the last year and more students are expected to earn credits by the end of this school year. There are co-teaching models making instruction for students with disabilities and English language learners is seamless and instruction is enhanced as evident in collaborative planning sessions that enable these teams of teachers to adjust lessons and strategies so that the needs of all students are met. Some class schedules include double-periods to focus on project-based learning and to support students in taking charge of their own learning, such as science investigations. There is a Saturday tutoring program, specifically designed to support the defined needs of the groups of students served. The design of the master schedule strategically ensures that all teachers in the same grade have a joint inquiry period as well as their weekly professional development session. This decision provides the opportunity to align curriculum with student learning, to share student data, showcase best practices that are working and follow up specific areas for further inquiry. Teachers' collaborative work during these meetings often leads to changing student programs, as evidenced by changing a student's math section into an advanced class based on student data. The principal ensures that there are funds available to hire teachers with specific technical experience to ensure that high quality instruction is provided. The school has invested in numerous technology resources to make certain that students are exposed to current technology that prepare them for future endeavors in education or industry.

## What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to incorporate feedback loops that consistently provide accurate data to staff and shared instructional planning that increase professional growth resulting in accelerated learning for all students. (2.2)
  - There is good consistency in how teachers collect, analyze and share feedback with students and other teachers, as they adjust lesson and unit planning based on their analysis of students' data. Most teachers check for students' understanding during lessons with exit slips, 5 minute checks, and conferring. Using periodic assessments and data to inform teaching and the curriculum, the school uses rubrics and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. However, although feedback to students is often actionable, it does not always provide meaningful reasons why students were successful or offer helpful next steps for improvement in their learning. Some of the feedback provided to students is generic in nature and did not include specific next steps to accelerate learning. Checking for understanding throughout the lesson and what an end of a lesson assessment accomplishes is not in the majority of classrooms. Although teachers are using end of lesson reflection pieces and exit tickets, however, they were not always aligned to benchmarks of progress. Student work posted on bulletin boards and in folders includes rubrics but teacher feedback to further instruction was not always subject specific in reference to the rubrics. A few students were not able to fully articulate understanding of their next steps based on the feedback from the teacher or through a task-specific rubric, thus limiting student achievement at even higher levels.
- Refine teacher observations and professional development to systematize the school-wide instructional practices that increase professional growth. (4.1)
  - The principal implements a schedule of frequent visits to all teachers, along with visits by assistant principals and the SLC director. This is in addition to the six informal observations. Since teachers receive effective feedback, there exists a positive attitude about teacher growth. Individual teachers that need more time have targeted goals to incorporate more student-directed lessons and pair-share to facilitate not only participation but also increased learning. Using exit slips more strategically to check for understanding has been one of these targeted goals. As evidenced in a classroom, before transitioning to the exit slip, students were given verbal reminders to complete the task, but there was not enough time for this activity to be completed. Therefore, in most classrooms, the process exists, but it is not school-wide. The school has identified Danielson's Framework for providing feedback to teachers and has begun using it. Many teachers engage in inter-visitations, supervised, and on their own, and there is a mentoring process in place so that new teachers are supported through a strategic combination of short observations and focused walkthroughs. As stated by the principal's goals, there still exists the instructional challenge in building teacher capacity to support the schools vision that students learn best by teachers creating a cognitively vibrant environment through the incorporation of higher thinking skills, engaging tasks with purposeful grouping, creating multiple entry points for students at all levels. As a result, these systems for supporting teacher development have not yet lead to improved quality of work products for all learners.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

| School name: Hillcrest High School  | UD             | D | P          | WD |            |    |                |
|---|----------------|---|------------|----|------------|----|----------------|
| Overall QR Score  |                |   | 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>   |                |   |            |    |            |    |                |
| UD  | Underdeveloped | D | Developing | P  | Proficient | WD | Well Developed |