

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Robert F. Kennedy Community High School

High School 25Q670

**75-40 Parsons Boulevard
Queens
NY 11366**

Principal: Beshir Abdellatif

**Dates of review: December 9-10, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Flavia Puello-Perdomo**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert F. Kennedy Community High School is a high school with 691 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 11% Black, 35% Hispanic, 24% White, and 30% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 89.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teacher pedagogy demonstrates consistent instructional coherence and effective differentiated practices that result in improved student performance across the school. (1.2)
 - Strategic collaboration between teachers and administration and targeted student supports result in instructional coherence across the school that is evident in all classrooms. Teachers conduct a learning style survey at the beginning of the year and use this to adjust teaching practices. In addition, with the support of administration, teachers conduct an in depth analysis of student data to identify student learning needs. This information is then used to make learning practical and to support rigorous student engagement. Currently, there is a school-wide focus on questioning and discussion as a pathway for students to demonstrate cognitive reasoning and higher order thinking, promote student engagement, and demonstrate mastery of learning objectives on multiple assessments. During classroom observations, questions were scaffolded leading to a variety of possible answers thus allowing all students to engage in class discussions and maximize student participation and higher level thinking. During an inquiry lesson on photosynthesis, students were first asked to think about what a plant uses to gain all of its weight. Students' responses ranged from water to sunlight and soil, to oxygen and soil based on prior knowledge. The teacher then used this discussion to explain how scientists had similar questions over 400 years ago and discussed Helmont's experiment. The teacher incorporated visuals that further engaged students in class discussions, particularly English language learners in the class. This careful attention to multiple entry points enabled all students to demonstrate a deep understanding of the process of photosynthesis as evidenced by discussions and response to questioning. As a result of teachers' attention to students' learning needs, instructional practices have resulted in higher levels of student progress as measured by unit assessments and daily formative assessments across all classes and grades.
 - Student products demonstrate both content knowledge and student ownership of learning. Teachers support students to become independent learners and thinkers and promote instructional activities that push students' engagement and accountability. For instance, during the grade 9 English class, students engage in a debate about whether or not Persepolis should be banned from Chicago public schools? Rather than using a traditional classroom discussion, a Socratic approach gave students the opportunity to respond to each other by using evidence from their reading and prior knowledge. Students who were not involved in the debate observed and had an opportunity to give feedback to the team as well as having a chance to offer their opinion. In another class, students provided peer feedback to their partners during the lesson. Additionally, teachers, consistently encourage students to respond to each other's questions and opinions, through think-pair-share activities or by simply asking students if they agree or disagree with statements that are made during class. As a result of these instructional practices, students are motivated to share their opinions, and student work and discussion consistently indicate higher order thinking and active engagement.
- School leader and staff have an ongoing understanding of the performance and progress of all students which strategically informs instructional decisions at the classroom level resulting in improved academic outcomes for all learners. (2.2)

- The administration and teachers regularly develop and review a range of formative assessments at the classroom level to evaluate student comprehension and progress toward standard level performance. For instance, decisions around student placement for mathematics for either a two or one year sequence are based on grade 8 performance and baseline assessment completed upon student admissions. Assessment is ongoing and on average every two weeks every teacher will assess student progress while all departments conduct mid-year and final uniform assessments aligned to the State exams. Annotated rubrics and work with meaningful teacher comments enable students to recognize next steps. Teachers use assessment data to conduct item analyses that allow them to determine target standards and skills where they need to focus their instruction. For instance, assessment data revealed that students struggled with vocabulary and, for this reason the school is now infusing academic vocabulary and literacy across the content areas. Moreover, teachers conduct different types of assessments so that students have choice and multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Within a marking period, students will have an opportunity to show mastery through writing, in class presentation, and in class assessment, aligned to the Regents exams. In addition, this data is entered into an electronic grading system that serves to track student progress. On a daily basis, teachers check for understanding using exit slips, asking students to stop and think, and by getting a pulse when walking around during the independent work. Additionally, teachers deepen student understanding by asking students to explain what they are working on to the teacher or their peers. Students also express that they are always provided with rubrics when assigned a task, which give them an opportunity to self-assess prior to submitting their work. Furthermore, students reflect on their progress based on teacher feedback, peer feedback and self-assessments provided by the teacher. For these reasons, students are able to clearly state their specific goals and next steps for improving their academic performance and currently 80% of the 2014 cohort is on track to graduate within four years.
- Communication about high expectations and the availability of supports to meet expectations result in strong partnerships among administration, teachers and parents to prepare students for college and career. (3.4)
 - School leaders communicate high expectations for staff as evidenced by ongoing professional development opportunities, faculty conference agendas, principal's letters to families, the consistent cycle of formal and informal observations, and opportunities available for students to engage in advanced placement classes and community service experiences. The Danielson Framework is the basis for walkthroughs and formal observations conducted by the administrative team. It also guides teachers' inter-visitations. Evidence from observations is used to develop teacher's goals and actionable steps to improve instruction and pedagogy. Additionally, this information is used to highlight best practices across the school and to help make decisions for professional development offerings. This process results in a culture of mutual accountability to follow through on expectations for high quality teaching. Furthermore, the school leader expectation is that every senior will graduate with no less than six college credits. Currently, the school has over ninety students that will have three or more college credits by the time they graduate in June. The school has about thirty Juniors that are enrolled in College Now courses who will be earning six credits and will be graduating with around ten to fifteen college credits. One of the parents explained, "They get involved, they are concerned about their education. They are pushing for them to get more credits than what they need every year. Kids can walk out of here with 18 college credits which is a great financial help for us." The school offers the PSAT exam to grade 9 to use this as a baseline towards college readiness and to identify gaps in learning. The school leaders use the online grading system and STARS to monitor teacher assessment and the frequency in which teachers are

assessing student learning. This allows them to identify trends and to offer support to teachers. The principal stated, "We make sure the tasks are high level so that they are developing students towards college readiness." The school leaders conference with all teachers to review scholarship data and correlate this data to Regents performance to make sure class expectations are aligned with standardized assessments. Additionally, parents applaud the student progress updates available through the school's online reporting system and the accessibility of teachers and the administrative team to engage in dialogue related to daily assignments and student progress. One of the parents explained, "Teachers even come down and have breakfast with kids and tutor them. Kids can send their math teacher a picture of the problem when they are stuck and he can help them. Here you can call a teacher and email them, and you know they will respond." Because of the school's high expectations, students are motivated about school as reflected in the school's current yearly attendance of over 90% and the 2012-2013 graduation rate of 80.9%.

- School leaders strategically utilize a research based framework of teaching to evaluate teacher practice and provide focused professional development, resulting in strong teacher practice that positively affects student learning. (4.1)
 - School leaders are very specific in terms of their expectations for pedagogical practice. All teachers collaborate with supervisors to set pedagogical goals that align to the school's overarching goals and individual competencies determined by evaluation along a rubric connected to the Danielson researched based framework for teaching. Formal observation coupled with frequent learning walks measures progress toward reaching pedagogical goals and teachers receive effective feedback that provides detailed next steps for improving instructional practice. Observations are shared among administrators to norm their expectations for teacher practice. New teachers as well as teachers in need of support are well supported by lead teachers and administration. For example, lead teachers will visit teachers to provide feedback to address areas of improvement identified during observations. Additionally, common planning time and department meetings facilitated by the lead teacher support the instructional practices across the school. Furthermore, the principal encourages teachers to attend outside professional development around areas of improvement or interest. The principal continually analyzes data from observation cycles to understand teacher skills and impact on student outcomes. Professional development plans for content teams align to data and result in improved teacher practice. The culture of the school is one of professional learning where teachers articulate feeling extremely supported by administration and have full recognition of how their practice influences student learning. This is also evident by the practice of teacher teams. Consequently, a review of formal observation data, as seen in written reports and evidenced in classroom visits, indicates growing competency among teachers in using high level questioning to engage students in meaningful discussion, thereby moving the school toward reaching its overall goals.
- School leaders make strategic organizational decisions in order to align resources to the school's goals, enhance student achievement outcomes, and improve learning for all student groups. (1.3)
 - School leaders creatively target every resource towards the achievement of school wide goals and aligned with the citywide instructional expectations. The principal dedicates most of the school budget toward teaching and learning. The school has invested funding to make sure that every classroom is equipped with adequate instructional technology. Funding is allocated for a Saturday program for credit recovery, English Language Learner support, and homework help. Students are

provided with free Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) prep classes; additionally, online blended learning is also available and assists students with credit accumulation, Regents exam prep and English language learner tutoring, and to send teachers out to professional development aligned to the Common Core Standards and Danielson framework. The principal created an assistant principal position of special education, which also focuses on supporting the school's lowest third. The school leader adjusted the extended day learning to two days a week of seventy five minute instructional periods which they believe provide sufficient instructional time for students to go through an assignment, particularly if they struggle with its content. After conducting a needs assessment, the school identified that students had more deficiencies in math and social studies and subsequently tailored student support and credit recovery when applicable for these areas. Furthermore, teacher capacity is also considered when deciding on teacher assignment. For instance, the math lead teacher is assigned to the Integrated Co-teaching class in order to support low performing students. The literacy lead teacher is working with a grade 9 class given the success she achieved with grade 11 in the past in order to help build students literacy skills from the time they enter high school. The school leader also arranged for the staff to meet for a block of seventy five minutes per week in order for both content and grade level team teachers to come together to discuss curriculum, assessment, student work and progress. In addition, the school leader practically self-funds their summer school program. This allows them to keep students in their building. When summer school took place out of the building the average student attendance was 45%; however, now at their site attendance has improved to around 75-85% for the past two summers. Moreover, the school was able to graduate 22 students in August 2013 and 11 students the previous summer. As a result of these strategic decisions, time on task is optimized for the entire school community who share responsibility for cohorts of students and has resulted in consistent, improved student outcomes as evidenced by improvement in the overall graduation rate for all students and English language learners and special education students.

Areas for improvement

- Build on the quality of academic tasks to emphasize rigorous habits of thinking across all content areas thus cognitively engaging all learners. (1.1)
 - Students are engaged in learning experiences driven by Common Core aligned units of study. Throughout the school year, teacher teams discuss and analyze the degree of challenge in projects, other common assessments, and their alignment with the curricula taught. Teachers use student outcomes to adjust curriculum and instructional practices. Curriculum maps reflect standards addressed and task assessments that promote college and career readiness. Teachers engage students by creating assignments that require higher order skills. Socratic seminars and project-based learning structures are embedded across curricula. As a result, students are improving their skills and performance. For instance, students engage in dialogue, and respond to each other's thoughts and ideas with questions. However, in some classes, the tasks do not emphasize skills that require a high level of analysis and the learning does not allow for divergence in thinking. For instance, in one of the science classes visited, students were learning about the process of photosynthesis by mostly listening to a teacher presentation and taking notes from a PowerPoint presentation with minimal opportunity for student discussions. As a result of the school approach to curriculum development, instructional practices across content areas and grade levels are consistent and academic expectations for students are aligned. However, academic tasks that consistently deepen rigor are not yet embedded across grades and subjects so that all students, including English language learners and special education

students are able to demonstrate post-secondary readiness and deep thinking through all content areas.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Robert F. Kennedy Community High School	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