



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

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

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research**

**High School 332**

**965 LONGWOOD AVENUE  
BRONX, NY 10459**

**Principal: SHARIF RUCKER**

**Dates of review: April 9 - 10, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Carron Staple**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research is a high school with 261 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 41% Black, 56% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 25% special education students. Males account for 56% of the students enrolled and females account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 81.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Students and families appreciate the school's focused efforts on maintaining a safe and inclusive environment that supports students' social-emotional and academic growth. (1.4)
  - Throughout the building, and in every hallway and classroom, students and adults are cordial and treat each other with respect. Collectively, teachers, parents and students reported that the school is safe, that if there are any problems on the horizon that come to their attention a number of adults can be called upon to ensure the environment remains calm and safe for everyone, and that there is an ability to discuss issues privately with counselors or openly during Town Hall meetings. When meeting with parents they discussed how welcome the administrators and teachers always make them feel and their appreciation of the principal's open door policy. They praised the teachers for the additional time they worked with their children during and after the school day and the numerous events planned for students to celebrate their academic progress, community service, talent, and sportsmanship. The students discussed having multiple opportunities to engage in college discussions and trips, being prepared for college and careers, as well as having a voice and being able to communicate their feelings, concerns, and requests for advisement with a variety of adults who they turn to for social-emotional and academic support. School leaders encourage student voice via surveys, student council, and Town Hall meetings, and make certain decisions based on student input, such as reaching out to Central DOE officials to provide hot lunches on-site, have student events, and attend additional college trips. College access and preparation is provided via the College Now programs at Monroe College and Hostos Community College, and theater is made possible by Opening Act, an after school theater program providing students with an opportunity to unleash their creativity through improvisation and writing exercises. Decisions by school leaders that are informed by a shared set of beliefs around safety, respect and discipline, along with a student-friendly and caring dean, allows the school community to take a positive and proactive approach with students resulting in decreased conflicts among students, and a 50% reduction in the suspension rate.
- The school's assessment practices and data analysis across grades and subjects guide curriculum and instructional modifications that improve student achievement. (2.2)
  - The analysis and review of baseline assessments, student classwork, and homework, Regents, and mock Regents' exams, are part of the content teacher team protocols and procedures. Based on their findings teachers work to adjust instructional approaches, create rubrics for argumentative writing and for responding to document-based questions, the critical lens section of the English Regents, and for organizing and conducting group work, and curriculum as needed. Teachers use team-meeting outcomes to

develop and adjust tasks and assessments and add necessary scaffolds to support students. For example, through item analysis of the Living Environment Regents, it was determined additional support was needed for students to prepare for the short answer responses. To combat the trend of students failing to respond, the teachers determined that the students needed to be immersed in writing more about scientific topics and asking questions so that when assessed they would be able to respond. Teachers created the PIQ strategy. "P" for students writing about a plus or negative about the feature or topic, "I" for what the students found interesting and "Q" for questions the students needed more information about in order to have a more thoughtful discussion or be able to respond to the teacher's objective or essential questions. This practice has led to students receiving an 18% increase on the January 2014 Living Environment Regents with only five months of using this strategy, proving that targeted attention to assessment strategies is working with a the positive impact of increased passing rate on the Regents. Additionally, the online I-Learn software program gives further instructional support to individual teachers and teams through online review, assessment, and data reporting, to further adjust curriculum and instruction. Teachers use the program to differentiate assignments and exit slips, which is one type of check for understanding teachers use to assess student learning. Furthermore, CCLS aligned rubrics have been developed and are being used school-wide across all major subjects and grade levels. This allows students to effectively use the feedback given to improve their work and to understand the next steps for improvement and mastery of the standards. In student meetings, students shared that teacher feedback and the use of rubrics help them to make improvements and adjustments to their work. Additionally, students were able to discuss how assessment strategies such as turn-and-talk, accountable talk, Socratic questioning, journal response writing, and exit slips, helped them to gauge whether they learned the lesson of the day. These strategic decisions and practices have resulted in targeted supports to meet the needs of students and improve academic outcomes throughout all classes.

- Post-observation feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework provides clear expectations, strengths, and actionable next steps, which results in improved teacher practice and increased student progress. (4.1)
  - Feedback memorialized in observation reports emphasizes teachers using practices and strategies that engage, challenge, and require students to think critically and at a higher cognitive level. A review of observations shows evidence that administrators hone their attention to student work, the manner in which students engage with each other, and the teachers' next steps in checking for understanding and assessing learning.
  - The school has developed a system that bridges the gap between the trends administrators observe and track, and the professional development provided to meet the needs of teachers. The school's professional development calendar focuses on three major Danielson competencies; Designing Coherent Instruction, Using Questioning and Discussion, and Using Assessment in Instruction, in direct alignment with the Citywide Instructional Expectations. School

leaders also use feedback from teacher self-assessment surveys to support improving pedagogy. Specifically, teachers self-assess their practice using the Danielson Framework, complete a needs assessment survey about the competencies they are challenged with, and set professional goals, which school leaders use to develop a professional development menu and calendar. Professional development activities include learning walks, sharing best practices, and specific training and discussion to support teachers with creating higher-level questions and aims, strategies on assessment for learning strategies, and lesson design for the instruction for diverse learners. As a result, coherent lesson plan templates that include essential questions, big ideas, common-core aligned learning targets, and embedded checks for understanding for all students including sub-groups, are utilized across all grades and subjects to elevate school-wide instructional practices that promote teacher growth and elevate student learning.

- Teachers collaborate daily to examine student work, discuss student progress, and share ideas and best practices that improve student outcomes. (4.2)
  - Content teacher teams use a protocol for looking at student work to improve student learning. The English Language Arts (ELA) team analyzed a mock Regents relative to the types of questions students made the most errors. After reviewing the error analysis report, questions were categorized and teachers discussed what they believed were issues leading to student error and why each student did not perform well. Additionally, team members discuss strategies such as modifying the writing rubric and supporting students further with annotating, and then collectively determine next steps for instruction and further assessment. As a result of collaboration, there is consistency in the use of writing rubrics, as observed during class visits, developmental lesson planning, and common assessments administered, which results in cohesive patterns of instruction and format across classes for all students. Teams' daily collaborations help to inform instructional best practices that prepare students for college and beyond. The school also has grade teams that meet regularly to discuss the academic progress and social-emotional development of students who may then become flagged due to chronic lateness, absenteeism, illness, behavioral issues, and failure in two or more classes or exams. Teachers utilize an excellent protocol for meeting students' needs by gathering all the information they can from ARIS, from content teachers, the guidance counselor, and scholarship reports. They review transcripts, discuss academic progress with each of the student's teachers and look for trends, as evidenced during a case conferencing meeting. After that meeting, another meeting with the student and parent (if available) is scheduled to discuss the student's progress and challenges. The student I observed was consistently missing her first and last period class of the day and was failing the course due to multiple absences, missed exams and assignments. When the team asked her why she was missing those classes, she explained that her mother was ill and that she became responsible for bringing and picking up her sibling from school. The student was informed that it was not her responsibility and that the school would intervene and advocate on her behalf so she could attend all of her classes. When I visited her

eighth period class later on that day, the student was in class fully participating and engaged; this made possible by the grade team leader calling the mom to ask if different arrangements could be made for her younger son. This immediate follow-up of the team leader clearly resulted in the student being able to remain in the school for the rest of the day. When asked about the impact this team has had for students, the teachers stated that attendance had risen from 81% to 85%, absence and lateness had decreased by 25%, and fewer students were falling through the cracks because of the team's strategic and targeted support.

## What the school needs to improve

- Further ensure that all curricula maps and units of study are consistently aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and cognitively engage a diverse group of learners to prepare them for college and careers. (1.1)
  - School leaders and teachers have identified some key standards that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and there is evidence that teachers are integrating the Citywide Instructional Shifts. One of the areas identified after administering the MOSL assessment to students was their challenge in using text to support arguments and responses around claims and counter claims. Evidence of the school's emphasis in these areas can be found in rubrics, student work, and class discussions. Specifically, in one classroom the English teacher posed a question related to Franz Kafka's the "Hunger Artist" by asking in English and in Spanish "What evidence leads you to believe that he is having an issue?" The student responded that the man will not eat because he does not want to give in. The teacher asks, "What evidence can you share with the class that supports your answer?" The student refers to the part of the text where the character keeps singing because he does not want to eat. The teacher responds by asking, "Can anyone find a different part of the text that confirms this, or does anyone have a different opinion about why he will not eat or what demonstrates conflict?" This line of questioning and probing in this class caused students to analyze, engage in argumentative discussions, and cite textual evidence to support their claims. In another class, the special education Living Environment teacher had students working in pairs to form agreements about how the excretory system maintained homeostasis. Students had to listen to each other's claims and discuss what they were confused about, then support each other in finding the answer to a question posed. Additionally, the school has prepared a lesson plan format that is aligned to the Danielson competency to ensure that teachers are designing coherent instruction for a variety of learners. However, in spite of the shared lesson plan template and the school's attempt to make instructional practices more cohesive, the school is still in the process of revising and aligning curricula and differentiated tasks consistently across all grades and classes. In one math class, the teacher had a commendable lesson plan template completed with multiple entry points and differentiated tasks for a variety of learners, however, this part of the plan was not observed and all students received the same entry point and task, thus hindering a few

students who needed extra support to complete the more challenging math problems.. Consequently, refinements to curriculum planning were not fully evident across all classes.

- Strengthen teaching strategies so all learners will continue to be engaged in rigorous and challenging tasks where they are able to demonstrate their higher-order thinking and produce work products aligned to standards (1.2)
  - The school is committed to a set belief of pedagogical practices reflected across classrooms that every student should be challenged through the inquiry and writing process and provided instruction that creates a classroom experience of high expectations and thinking. In almost every classroom teachers provided visuals, different texts where necessary, dictionaries, and groupings where students were involved in thoughtful discussions. It is evident that the teachers have worked very hard on Danielson's competencies 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion, and 3d: Using Assessment in Instruction, as all of the teachers asked questions that ranged from levels 1 through 4 on the Depth of Knowledge chart and checked for understanding throughout lessons. Students were asked to explain their answers orally and in writing, and either challenged or added onto their peers' responses making discussions rich and engaging. In one class, the teacher was facilitating a student-led Socratic seminar based upon text students had read from "Lord of the Flies". The two major essential questions students were asked were, "Is Golding right?" Do all human beings have the capacity to be evil, particularly when they are empowered as part of a group?", and "How does a person's mentality and behavior change between being an individual and involved as a crowd?" The students were responsible for referring to text, answer questions, ask for clarification, make judgments that could be defended by text, connect the reading to the real world, and take notes about an idea they wanted to come back to after all participants had spoken. Students were highly engaged, asked questions of each other, and were able to take a stance using text-based evidence. Consequently, the passing rate of students has improved in ELA and Integrated Algebra regents by 14% and 16% respectively. As of January 31, although more students were accumulating course credits and passing more Regents' exams, as evidenced by the scholarship and Regents reports, instruction across the vast majority of classrooms is not yet impacting all students so that they can meet the demands of receiving a high school diploma in four years.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research	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>