



Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Harry S. Truman

High School 455

750 Baychester Avenue

Bronx

NY 10475

Principal: Keri Alfano

Dates of review: March 18 - 20, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Harry S. Truman is a high school with 1898 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 53% Black, 43% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 87.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides a range of personalized services through multiple support structures that effectively address students' needs, resulting in gains in academic and social emotional learning by all students. (1.4)
 - A guidance counselor works with every student and family members to address areas of concern and eliminate any barriers to the student's success. An attendance team works with counselors to support at-risk students, especially chronically absent students, developing individual attendance plans and monitoring the students' academic performance. The guidance staff offers advisory classes to students, Tuesdays through Thursdays, getting to know them very well as the students engage in conversations about personal goals, challenges, and accomplishments. In addition, the implementation of theme-based houses promotes small learning communities that support ninth grade students' in transitioning to a large high school. Further, with relationship management initiatives such as keep "Yourself Safe" (KYS) and "Relationship Abuse Prevention Program" (RAPP) complementing the SPARK program that counsels students about drug prevention, bereavement, self-esteem, sexuality and family conflicts, all students are constantly immersed in learning experiences that contribute to their academic as well as social emotional growth. This is evidenced by few incidents of misconduct and an increased percentage of students passing Regents' exams in history, math, and science, based on school data for 2013 and 2014.
 - Parents stated that Pupil Path, an online program, provides them with 24-hour access to their children's grades, assignments due, teachers' comments, daily attendance, and any concern that needs their immediate attention. A professional development binder shows that teachers engage in on- and off-site activities to improve their effectiveness in addressing the social-emotional needs of students, utilizing effective classroom management routines, and instructional strategies to hold students accountable for learning. The school enhances students' academic and social emotional learning through partnerships with organizations such as Sports and Arts, which allows students to have access to after school activities in media, culinary arts, dance, basketball, football, music and weight lifting, and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) which provides leadership and character development experiences. In addition, partnerships with Montefiore Hospital and Build On further support students' social and emotional learning growth through community service projects. Co-Op Tech, Law Enforcement Academy, National Science Foundation, Bronx Net, Mercy College, Monroe College, and Bronx Community College, provide enrichment activities that also support students' academic and social emotional development. These activities have contributed to improvement in attendance, increased enrollment in advanced placement and honors classes, and high levels of student participation in internships and community service learning.

- Administrators communicate high expectations for learning to staff, students, and families, and implement varied support systems that result in staff and student progress in meeting the expectations. (3.4)
 - The principal clearly articulates high expectations for all members of the school community, through discussions at regular faculty conferences, bulletins, memos, individual and team conversations, and a staff handbook that details expectations related to instruction, professional development, and many other areas of school operations. In addition, using the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching, administrators reinforce high expectations for instruction, with all teachers receiving professional development support in skill building to improve questioning, embedding technology into instruction, and scaffolding instruction, thus expanding their capacity to deliver instruction that allows students to meet expectations set for them. Administrators also meet regularly with teachers to provide feedback on lessons and engage them in reviews of student portfolios, class data, and their own written self-assessment profile, so that all teachers are constantly reminded of expectations that they are expected to meet. Through these mechanisms, administrators provide targeted and individualized supports, thus promoting shared accountability for staff and student learning.
 - Parents report that staff members invite them to participate in creating learning goals for their children and guidance counselors meet with them to review graduation requirements, career options, college admissions, and application steps, sources of financial aid and scholarships, as well as advanced placement, honors, college level and career and technical education courses available to their children. Communication tools such as a student and parent handbook, a weekly newsletter, postings on the school's own website, Facebook and Twitter, REMIND101 text messages and School Messenger calls, keep families up-to-date on school events, such as upcoming college tours for students and families, internships, service learning, vocational initiatives, and extracurricular activities, thus empowering them to help their children take advantage of the many learning opportunities that support college and career readiness for all students. A summer bridge/transition program allows ninth grade students and their families to gain awareness of what it takes to succeed in high school, and the Pupil Path online data system keeps all families informed about student performance, fostering communication with teachers about their children's progress and any needed follow-up to support learning. Fueled by these supports, the school's partnership with families has contributed to students' progress towards college and career readiness, as evidenced by many students gaining scholarships to colleges, receiving acceptance to top colleges outside of New York State, or earning an Associate's degree prior to graduating from the school, by taking college level courses while still in high school .
- School leaders and faculty engage in meaningful goal setting which engages all members of the school community in decision-making and progress monitoring, with positive impact on student achievement. (3.1)
 - The principal's belief that learning experiences must reflect students' diverse interests and ability levels and offer multiple opportunities to maximize learning, is reflected in the school's Comprehensive Education

Plan and other documents that align goals to that perspective. For example, goals include having every student graduate in four years without remedial work, and improving rigor in instruction across all disciplines. These goals are tracked via a review of observation data, lesson artifacts, and student scholarship reports, leading to adjustments that are directly linked to the acceleration of students' learning. For teachers, adjustments include increased participation in one-to-one conferences with administrators, and additional targeted intervisitations to strengthen pedagogy. For students, adjustments include after school and Saturday academic intervention programs for overage and under-credited students, English language learners and students with disabilities, the addition of the technology-based program, Inspire Literacy (iLit) to increase reading levels of English language learners and students with disabilities, and a Bilingual virtual class in US History to improve the performance of the Spanish-speaking ELLs on the history Regents. These adjustments support an increased rate of credit accumulation to enhance students' academic and social emotional development.

- Parents reported that they regularly engage in school level goal setting with administrators through monthly Parent Teacher Association and School Leadership Team meetings, while school staff and student council representatives stated that they meet with administrators at designated times to provide their input. School staff noted that there was shared decision-making related to school goals that target additional support for struggling students and plans for additional certification for courses related to career and technical education. Parents confirmed their input in discussions to secure Title 1 funding for instructional initiatives, including the hiring of additional staff. Students stated that student council members conduct surveys school wide to help determine electives to be offered, methods for securing cell phones, and the design of logos for uniforms. One student added that the school's newsletter and website "tell everyone everything about school events". Thus, goal setting and decision-making, based on school data, is well informed by regular communication with and input from all constituent groups that help determine next steps for ongoing school improvement.
- The school's assessment systems provide staff and students with feedback about students' progress towards learning goals, resulting in adjustments to curricula and instruction that promote increased student achievement. (2.2)
 - Teachers use a school-wide grading policy, aligned to curricula, to provide feedback to students and their families, on student performance in all disciplines. Teachers also use task-specific rubrics to assess student's proficiency and content knowledge related to specific performance tasks, providing feedback to students regarding what they do well and what needs improvement. Rubrics, aligned to selected State standards and past Regents, help students develop proficiency in meeting requirements for Regents' assessments, as a majority of teachers design midterms and final assessments by mirroring Regents' exams. Each student has access to these assessments and their results and students use the rubrics to perform their own data analysis and write reflections on what they need to improve on. Thus, assessment data readily provides ongoing and valuable feedback to staff and students regarding levels of student achievement.

- At the start of the school year, ninth grade students received an online diagnostic assessment to determine their reading levels, while students in grades 10 through 12 received mock Regents exams in all core subjects, leading to skills-based item analyses that inform teaching points and lesson strategies. In addition, there are ongoing unit assessments from which teachers cull data to determine and make adjustments to improve student performance on subsequent assessments and class assignments. School wide trend analyses identified weaknesses in answering multiple choice questions and in constructing effective paragraphs in essay writing, so teachers collaborated to incorporate new strategies and scaffold learning in re-teaching for student mastery of these skill areas. Artifacts showed that the adjustments resulted in improvement in the majority of students' performance on a subsequent assessment of these skill areas. The principal also noted that as a result of a review of grade level assessment data, she pushes teachers to infuse more writing across content areas. Thus, the school's assessment program yields data that drives adjustments in curricula and instruction to improve student progress.

What the school needs to improve

- Further refine curricula across content areas, to ensure that all students consistently have access to rigorous and cognitively engaging learning tasks. (1.1)
 - Curriculum team members work collaboratively with other staff to create curriculum maps, units of study, and performance tasks, to increase rigor in instruction. The principal prioritizes English language arts standards as the media for infusing emphasis on rigorous tasks through literacy-based assessments across content areas that target students' capacity to draw inferences from texts and engage in problem solving. Thus, portfolios for some students show some evidence of rigorous tasks, including critical lens essays in English language arts, argumentative writing in social studies, explanations of problem solving steps in math, and descriptions of processes in science and other courses. However, a focus on rigorous tasks is not consistent across grades and content areas, as evidenced by some tasks in other students' folders and those on bulletin boards, lesson plans, curriculum maps, and unit plans. This limits student growth towards proficiency in developing rigorous habits that accelerate their learning.
 - The school's curricula shows concerted efforts to provide diverse learners with access to engaging curricula via technology-based programs, that include Inspire Literacy (iLit), designed to raise reading levels of alternative assessment students' and ninth graders who scored a level 1 on the eighth grade ELA exam, Apex for honors students, Compass online classes, and Castle Learning, to supplement curricula across content areas. Other evidence of planning for cognitive engagement of all learners comes from the school's plan to re-open its museum to support learning in social studies, and the use of its planetarium to have students perform hands-on investigations in astronomy. However, while there is some evidence that teachers are using assessment data to adjust instruction, this practice is still developing as teacher have only had six programmed common planning meetings this school year. Thus, opportunities to enhance their practice around analyzing student work are

limited, impacting incorporating the findings into further refinement of curricula across all content areas.

- Hone strategies to ensure multiple entry points so that all students consistently receive instruction that promotes high levels of student thinking and participation across grades and content areas. (1.2)
 - Some strategies observed in a few classrooms engage students in independent and paired work, reading texts to cite evidence for responses to tasks, examining primary sources to make inferences, and using academic vocabulary to explain solution to problems. However, in the majority of classrooms visited, all students worked on the same task and most teachers did not provide extension activities to support advanced learners in deepening their learning, thus hindering them from reaching their full potential. In other classrooms, including one with English language learners and students with disabilities, questions did not push students' thinking and tasks were of low demand, with a proliferation of photocopied sheets of paper that provided little room for in-depth written responses to tasks. As a result, teaching practices do not allow all students to consistently engage in productive struggle with challenging tasks, thus limiting their opportunities to demonstrate higher order thinking in their work.
 - Discussions in a few classes engaged students in sharing ideas about how to complete tasks. The teachers provided prompts to evoke discussions about tasks done or texts read and students took turns responding. For example, in a class of students with disabilities, the teacher engaged in skillful questioning that supported the students in navigating challenging vocabulary to construct their own meaning as they read a play, resulting in high levels of thinking and enjoyment in discussion by the entire class. However, this was not the norm across classrooms, as several lessons were so teacher dominated that most students sat quietly, listening to the teacher, with only a few responding when asked. For example, in a class where students presented research on a nutrition project while their peers used a rubric to rate the presentation, the teacher asked and answered her own questions about the presentation and did not allow any student to ask their own questions about the presentation or discuss the rating given. As a result, lessons do not typically facilitate student-to-student discussion and dialogue enabling all students to participate regularly in learning activities, thus minimizing deep levels of thinking.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Harry S. Truman	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