



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

**Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning**

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Secondary School for Law**

**High School K462  
237 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11215**

**Principal: Oneatha Swinton**

**Date of review: April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Caron Martin**

## The School Context

Secondary School for Law is a high school with 351 students from grade nine through grade twelve. The school population comprises 66% Black, 25% Hispanic, 5% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

| <b>Instructional Core</b>  |                            |                       |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i>   | <b>Area of:</b>            | <b>Rating:</b>        |
| 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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</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>Focus</b>               | <b>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
| <b>School Culture</b>  |                            |                       |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i>   | <b>Area of:</b>            | <b>Rating:</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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
| <b>Systems for Improvement</b>   |                            |                       |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i>   | <b>Area of:</b>            | <b>Rating:</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>Celebration</b>         | <b>Well Developed</b> |

## Area of Celebration

|                           |   |                |                       |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

All teachers are engaged in collaborative inquiry-based professional development teams. Distributive leadership structures afford teacher teams the opportunity to make key decisions about teaching and learning through the analysis and revision of curriculum and student work products.

### Impact

The work, frequency and variation of teacher teams provide all teachers with opportunities to engage in shared leadership and professional collaboration resulting in improved teacher capacity, instructional coherence, and improved student outcomes across the school community.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams utilize protocols for looking at student work and action research as a method of bringing shared accountability to the collaborative meetings. Typical tasks during these meeting times include developing subject-specific reading strategies so students improve their ability to read non-fiction texts and analyzing mock Regents outcomes to collaborate around next instructional steps. As observed in a teacher meeting, teachers were reviewing lowest-third student data from algebra and geometry, cross-referencing them to the Saturday Regents Boot Camp attendance.
- Teacher teams regularly analyze classroom practice and assessment data while sharing student work as they push forward student growth. Implementation of specific strategies and shared classroom improvements has resulted in increased student engagement and improved student learning for high-achieving students and diverse populations. Anecdotal teacher observations from tracking student responses and samples of student work reveal how student choice for Do Now activities and the use of visuals has increased student discussion depth and analysis.
- All teachers take responsibility for establishing priorities and providing mutual accountability throughout the school via the wide breadth of collaboration and professional growth opportunities across teams such as grade team inquiry, department chairs, assessment coordinators, and design and distribution of the staff handbook. Team participation and facilitation ensures that all staff demonstrates an integral role in virtually every major decision affecting student learning and growth throughout the school. For example, teachers make decisions about student programming, additional academic supports and shifts in students' daily schedules upon review of the Google tracking tool used to monitor student progress.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, pedagogy is aligned to the curricula and demonstrates a school-wide belief about how students learn, providing options learning, informed by the Danielson Framework, and discussions at the team and school levels. While teaching strategies reflect strategic multiple entry points, supports and extensions to the curricula that meet the needs of all learners, there is inconsistent practice in deepening discussions to demonstrate higher-levels of student participation and reflection.

### Impact

The coherence of teacher beliefs supports all students to be engaged in cognitively challenging tasks across classrooms. However, uneven implementation of discussion strategies and protocols resulted in missed opportunities for higher-level reflective discourse and ownership amongst students exclusive of teacher moderation and facilitation.

### Supporting Evidence

- While key questions and visual cues were observed in all classrooms, in only six of the eight classrooms visited, students were observed freely discussing the content present, posing their own designed questions, and questioning one another on their thought process. In a literature class, the teacher moderated the discussion between students around 3 questions, “What would you see? What civilization? Why can’t it be?” while students responded to each question posed by the teacher. In an art class, students led the discussion about the concept of collaboration as the teacher posed: “Does collaboration involve both the apprentice and the teacher? How might we chart to show similarities and differences?” As students discussed, “We can use a Venn Diagram for this.” Yet, in an Earth Science class, students were exploring what causes weather and how it differs from climate as the teacher walked around and recorded student questions and responses to one another, but did not interject or pose questions as the students in each group choose which questions from the Do Now they wanted to discuss with one another.
- Initially stated by the principal and echoed in both teacher team meetings, the community believes that students learn best through visual literacy and options provided during the delivery of instruction. Students had options to engage with the content, either independently, in small groups and student facilitated groups. In all eight classrooms visited, teachers provided students with options on how to access the content whether through use of technology, SMARTboard display, or paper/pencil. Students selected from multiple options to complete the Do Now and the Exit Tickets to demonstrate their thinking. Each option was more challenging than the preceding choice. For a visual arts class, students completed the Do Now: “Option 1: What is the difference between an apprenticeship and a collaboration? Can you find any similarities? Option 2: What is your response to the following article excerpt? Make a connection to another occupation where this may also be common practice.”
- Observed in classrooms, teachers required students to engage with rigorous content and demonstrate their thinking. In an Advanced Placement (AP) Literature class students were required to compare Prometheus Unbound to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and to analyze Shelley’s warnings in the text. In a living environment classroom, students were tasked with exploring genetics citing evidence from a wide-range of informational texts, leveled to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom.

## Additional Findings

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|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.1 Curriculum</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
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### Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Through both horizontal and vertical planning, teachers utilize a variety of data streams in order to refine tasks in a coherent manner ensuring all learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners are able to demonstrate high-levels of thinking.

### Impact

All students experience a meaningful curriculum that promotes authentic writing, complex problem-solving and a chance to develop talents that showcase their learning in multiple ways. Through careful consideration of learners' needs when selecting and adapting curricula that is Common Core aligned, all students, are engaged in academic tasks which emphasize rigorous habits across grades and subject areas.

### Supporting Evidence

- In eight out of eight lesson plans reviewed, all included variations of differentiating instruction to both modify instruction for students who need additional assistance as well as extending and challenging the content for those which require increased rigor and engagement. In the AP Literature lesson students were provided additional graphic organizer options and support with the academic vocabulary involved in both texts while students were also required to extend their learning by identifying additional questions to the classroom discussion. Similarly in the living environment lesson three different labs were designed for three leveled-groups of students around the same aim: How can we use physical models to understand the effects of climate change?
- All lesson plans provide explicit reference to resources used, multiple entry points for all learners, including students with disabilities and English Language learners and interim check points throughout the period. A review of unit plans, showed teachers engaged in a peer review vertically addressing gaps or highlighting best instructional practices, asking probing questions and suggesting revisions. In the 12<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts unit titled "Romeo and Juliet Out Loud", teachers provided feedback stating, "Make the purpose of the instruction clear. Ask students to look at multiple causes...extend the objective, students will draw evidence from the text as they analyze." In living environment "Meteorology" unit one teacher stated to the other, "add think-pair-share, show them pictures to pique their interest and provide a list of credible websites."
- In all unit plans reviewed, teachers incorporated strategies to address academic vocabulary as it presents a challenge for students and impacts conceptual understanding, especially for English language learners and students with disabilities. Teacher planning also reflected extended considerations for all students in addition to the coherence with multiple entry points, reflected in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) considerations explicitly identified for students. In a Common Core Algebra lesson, the teacher identified teaching assistants for groups, varied the Depth of Knowledge questions, provided Cornell Notes for one group and grouped students based on previous day's quiz scores. In an art lesson, the plan provided two different texts to respond to the Do Now question "How can collaboration be used in an artist's practice?" The lesson included a third text, to be used as a read-aloud, to model making connections, and to deepen whole class discussion. The plan provided students a connection with a partner to determine how texts related to "collaboration".

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>2.2 Assessment</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
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### Findings

Across all classrooms, teachers and students use a variety of formative and summative assessments and checking for understanding practices aligned to the school's curricula that offer a broad picture of students' strengths and areas for growth. Teachers use common assessments and tracking student progress across grades and content areas.

### Impact

All teachers use this information to provide students with meaningful actionable feedback, so all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities demonstrate increased mastery and resulting in informed decisions that impact student progress across all classrooms. Teachers adjust curricular and instructional decisions based on this data to meet all students' learning needs and students are aware of their next steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers regularly create and utilize rubrics aligned with their curriculum and school wide literacy initiatives, as well as follow grading policies, to provide access for all students. Common Core-aligned performance tasks are used to incorporate literacy across the content areas that are then followed with both rubric and comment-based feedback. Students also utilize the rubric to self-assess and provide peer feedback. Through the use of a Common Core-aligned "Literary Essay" rubric a student received the following feedback, "Excellent writing and understanding but almost no analysis and mostly summary. Cut down on the summary and answer the following questions, why is this quote important and what does this show? How and when?" For another student completing a free response synthesis, a peer wrote, "Create a clear thesis statement and isolate your argument using more persuasive language."
- During the observed Math Team Meeting, teachers were engaged in reviewing lowest-third student work products through a modified Tuning Protocol. The team determined that one particular student was, "strong in ELA and annotations. She does a great job of pulling out the information and plugging it in her response. But she's not translating that in math...I think her conceptual understandings are better than her computation." The teacher team then decided they would continue their reteach strategy. Additionally they determined to require the student to begin re-explaining her answers to the teachers after she has recorded them onto paper therefore allowing them to identify misconceptions in her practical understanding as she explains her thinking.
- Each teacher team utilizes Google docs to track the progress and record next steps for their assigned lowest-third subgroup. This subgroup data is then referred to during teacher team meetings through "Kid Talks".
- Law uses the Regents Exams, "Mock Regents", MOSL and AP "Mock Exam" results to track progress and adjust student goals across grades and subjects, as well as adjust student schedules. At the end of each marking period, progress is communicated to students through color-coded folders providing immediate feedback to all teachers as to the current state of a particular student's achievement, gaps and needs. Further, this also provides the progress check and real-time data to students who are or are not on the right track to graduate. Teachers and students now view the data from Regents and "Mock Regents" as necessary tools for instruction and progress.

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|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>3.4 High Expectations</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

School leaders, staff, parents and students all participate in fostering a school culture that consistently communicates and engenders high expectations for current and future achievement. Through the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, school staff sustains school wide expectations that inform instructional guidance and support preparing students for the next level.

### Impact

Clear expectations and communication result in students, their families, and all teachers having a mutual accountability and deep personal investment in the success of every student informed by systematic progress checks and clear paths for college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the staff regarding professionalism, instruction, expectations and training through a variety of venues: Danielson-focused weekly professional development sessions, observations and feedback, school calendars for staff and families, departmental and grade team meetings. Staff and parents echoed the use of Skedula, an online grade book and data warehouse, to track student progress and to communicate student strengths and next steps to parents and other teachers across classes.
- School leaders have implemented weekly inquiry team meetings through departmental team time for teachers to analyze data from their assigned lowest third sub-group. Team meeting minutes and identified interventions with follow up are captured on Google docs and shared with all staff so all teachers of each student, are aware of student's needs, progress and next steps to reach the next level of student achievement. Additionally, parents are invited and attend progress update meetings with the administration and teachers to review scholarship reports at the end of each grading period. One parent stated and others agreed, "We are involved along the way and work together whether we get the students here earlier or work to make sure they stay after school when everyone is available for extra support."
- Every senior has either submitted or is in the process of completing a college application to at least one college or university. The principal stated, "While many of our students will attend a two-year college, an increased number of 2015 seniors have been accepted to a four-year university." Through rigorous communication with parents and students through student-led conferences, monthly parent meetings, the use of Pupil Path, daily teacher communication and letters sent home, the school has substantially increased the percentage of college-ready students as measured by January Regents exam results.
- Parents stated, "The students and staff show great respect for the principal because they see how she connects with them. We are able to speak to the teachers whenever we need." Another parent stated she was working with the teachers about school-work her child will need to make up because of their vacation. During both the Fall and Spring Open School Nights, parents stated that teachers conferenced with them about the college pathways their children had begun to identify and how they could collectively support the college choice, while determining the best option for their child.