



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Community Health Academy of the Heights

Middle-High School M346

**504 West 158th Street
Manhattan
NY 10032**

Principal: Mark House

Date of review: April 30, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Fred Walsh

The School Context

Community Health Academy of the Heights is a secondary school with 631 students from grade six through grade twelve. The school population comprises 6% Black, 92% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 84.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Findings	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributive leadership structures are embedded and teachers play a key role in decision making.

Impact

Teacher teams collaborate on the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards which results in school-wide instructional coherence. Teacher leadership and instructional coaching strengthens teacher practice, ultimately raising student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- Department teams meet twice per month to evaluate and revise curriculum, tasks and student outcomes to ensure Common Core alignment and implementation of the instructional shifts. For example, an English department team was observed reviewing an eleventh grade teacher's argumentative essay task, rubric and samples of his student's work. A teacher leader facilitated the review and feedback-sharing, using a protocol designed by the department. At the conclusion of the meeting, the teacher had received actionable next steps on how to align the task and rubric language to the school's instructional focus, connect the unit to other subject areas and improve the quality of feedback; ensuring students know how to improve on their work.
- Grade teams meet twice per week, where teachers assess student academic and social progress. Following protocols, grade team leaders present two students to the team to review scholarship data and student work samples to identify specific interventions to cater to their need. To ensure clear communication across grades and promote horizontal alignment with school goals and initiatives, grade team leaders sit on the administrative cabinet which meets each Tuesday.
- Teachers spoke to being empowered by administration to make decisions. For example an eleventh grade team leader created a partnership with Teachers College School of Dentistry to provide after school tutoring for all students. After hearing feedback from students, a teacher started an intramural basketball program with other schools in the community.
- School leaders and teachers explained that in addition to regularly scheduled teacher team meetings, the vast majority of teachers regularly meet in small groups and engage in inter-visitations to share best strategies to improve their practice. Several teachers spoke about how these unscheduled meetings and classroom visits from school leaders have helped them to not only improve their practice but have empowered them to establish a strong culture where improving teaching and learning for students is the norm across the school and the expectations for all staff members.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and to the school's goals for instructional improvement. The quality of student work and participation varies across classrooms.

Impact

Teachers articulate a set of beliefs about how students learn best, however student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders identified a goal of improving classroom questioning and discussion techniques for the 2014-2015 school year. To address the goal, teachers were to include at least two higher order questions in each lesson. Across grades and subjects, questions were posted in classrooms; however questioning strategies to promote higher levels of student thinking and discussion were inconsistent.
- In a living environment lesson, teachers' questions were low level such as; what is a pathogen? And; what is a Punnett square? Student answers were repeated by the teacher, instead of redirecting their responses back to the class to promote student thinking and discussion. In the introduction to an economics lesson on personal finance the teacher asked the whole class; how does your career choice affect your lifestyle? The teacher called on students to share ideas without giving them a chance for genuine discussion among themselves.
- In the majority of classrooms visited, students worked collaboratively in groups solving problems. For example, in sixth grade math and science classrooms, students worked cooperatively to solve problems and complete tasks. In a 10th grade algebra *tag team* Regents review lesson, students worked in pairs on problems ranging in difficulty and rotating to ensure all questions were answered. In a 9th grade English lesson, students were seated in groups, generating a set of questions to guide peers when conducting research on their career choice. However, individual participation in group work activities and completion of tasks was uneven.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Standards. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills for students with special needs and English language learners.

Impact

Teachers make purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote cognitive engagement and comprehension of curricula of all students promoting career and college readiness across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher leaders and administrators meet during the summer to review school-wide curricula and to ensure units are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards. To build coherence and continuity across grades and subjects, the team then communicates school-wide expectations to the faculty. Teachers plan and share units and lessons on a Google doc planning template, which includes a range of elements such as unit title, duration, Common Core Standards, essential questions, learning target, aim, do now, and means of assessment.
- The principal and teachers interviewed articulated the school's mastery-based approach to unit and lesson planning. Across grades and subjects, curriculum documents include a learning target, aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and written as *I can...* statement. For example, in a 6th grade science unit on Interdependence, Photosynthesis and Food Webs, the learning target stated; *I can identify how biotic and abiotic factors interact in an ecosystem.* Students must demonstrate mastery before they move on to the next learning target.
- To build coherence across grades and promote an inquiry-based approach to curriculum revision, the English department follows the same scope and sequence of units. For example, students in grades 6 through twelve engage in argumentative essay writing lessons simultaneously. During English department meetings, teachers use samples of students' argumentative essays to evaluate the quality of tasks and to determine need for revision.

Findings

Teachers create assessments and use rubrics aligned to the school curricula to provide students and teachers with actionable feedback. Data from student work products is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Impact

The school's grading policy and practices provide students and teachers with valuable data and actionable feedback regarding student achievement. Results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and students spoke to the school-wide grading system, which is based upon individual student mastery of learning targets. Scores on learning targets are determined by the teacher, based upon evidence provided by the student and measured against a teacher or department created rubric. The measurement of student performance is based upon a four point scale. On any learning target a student may receive one of six scores. Teachers post all assessment results in the online grade-reporting system; Jump Rope, which indicates to students and parents the individual's progress toward mastery. Students and parents interviewed articulated a clear understanding of how grades are determined and what are next steps the child can take to improve.
- This year, school leaders and teachers adjusted classroom assessment practices based on feedback conducted during the 2013-14 year. Observations revealed inconsistent practice in classroom checks for understanding. Teachers across grades and subjects implemented a practice of using exit slips at the start of each lesson to assess learning and make adjustments. Students spoke to completing exit tickets in their subjects and how teacher feedback helps them address misunderstanding.
- The principal, teachers and students spoke about the use of rubrics accompanied by specific targeted actionable feedback to students is an established ritual for improving student achievement across the school. Student work displayed in hallways included rubrics and targeted feedback from teachers. Students spoke to how they regularly use rubrics in class and with homework assignments and how teachers confer with them to provide next steps. Students were also able to show samples of student work from their portfolios that included specific feedback from teachers and explain how receiving regular feedback has made them better writers.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders, teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners that are connected to a path to college and careers.

Impact

Teacher teams provide families with ongoing and detailed feedback of their child's progress and provide guidance and supports to prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents shared how the school does an excellent job of informing them of all upcoming events and provides regular updates about their children's academic progress. Parents mentioned how teachers regularly call them to inform them of their child's progress in class, remind them of upcoming exam dates, alert them of missing assignments, and inform them of when their child has outperformed expectations. Parents also spoke to how teachers provide parents with on-line resources, regularly answer emails and phone calls, and provide sample answers to difficult problems in order to help them support their children at home.
- The most recent school survey indicates that 100% of teachers agree or strongly agree with the statement; *my school sets appropriately high expectations for student work in their classes*. 93% of students agree or strongly agree with the statement; *most of the teaching staff at my school believes that all students can do well in school*. 96% of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; *the school has high expectations for my child*.
- All students visit a minimum of five colleges during their high school career. The school uses an online college preparation platform, Naviance to track each student's college application status. Most students are programmed for four years of world language, chemistry, physics and mathematics as part of the school's college readiness sequence. All incoming students are required to attend a summer orientation where all school-wide cultural and academic expectations are taught.
- Students spoke to their teachers' high expectations and understood the school's mastery-based instructional approach. They articulated a need to work continuously to meet learning targets in order to move onto new topics and described teachers and support staff as always available for instructional support.