



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**High School for Law and Public Service**

**High School 06M467**

**549 Audubon Avenue  
Manhattan  
NY 10040**

**Principal: Nicholas Politis**

**Date of review: December 4, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Musa Ali Shama**

## The School Context

The High School for Law and Public Service is a high school with 663 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 17% Black, 81% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0.5% Asian students. The student body includes 29% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86.4%.

## 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>Proficient</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>Developing</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>Proficient</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the faculty, students, and families, and have developed systems to support the school community in meeting those expectations. Ongoing feedback helps families understand student progress towards college and career readiness.

### Impact

Structures for communication of expectations, professional development trainings and ongoing communication with families foster a culture of high expectations for members of the school community.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and administrators lead and participate in professional learning communities that were established to support professional growth and target areas connected to college and career readiness. Teachers present to their peers in planned professional development faculty meetings and use this forum to explore topics in teaching and learning aligned to Danielson Framework for Teaching among other topics.
- Teachers develop professional goals and meet with school leadership routinely to review their progress in meeting those goals. Administration provides teachers support and feedback aligned to their goals to ensure they are making progress, and when needed, targets additional support.
- All students are required to take four years of math and science in order to better prepared for college. Students stated that teachers and counselors encourage them to take advanced courses such as College Now, Advanced Placement, and other opportunities connected to college readiness. They also stated that teachers are always talking about college and how the work they are doing is preparing them for the next level.
- Students start making college trips in ninth grade and go every year to a different college. Guidance Counselors go into classes to teach lessons connected to college readiness, and teachers in the College Readiness professional learning community developed lessons to teach research and writing skills aligned to engaging students in coursework that prepares them for college.
- Parents articulated that they felt supported and informed regarding their child's academic progress. Parents praised the workshops around the college application process, financial aid application, and other information regarding their children. They highlighted that they received information in letters, email, and phone calls, all in their home language, that helped them understand how to support their children.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

The school's instructional focus was clearly defined and documented has having students engage in high quality discussions that extend thinking, deepen understanding, and craft their own questions to engage in learning. However, teachers across classrooms did not execute these practices that aligned to the school's instructional focus.

### Impact

Strategies that align to the school's beliefs on how students learn best and that are informed by Danielson's Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts are not being executed with consistency across classrooms leading to uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership developed a clear instructional focus to “increase productive, quality student-centered discourse in every classroom” aligned to Danielson's Framework for Teaching's 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques to support teachers in this area. Although this practice is being utilized effectively to engage students in some classes, it was not consistent across classrooms. For example, in a ninth grade English language arts class, a teacher was facilitating the process of developing thesis statements with her students and posed questions such as “What kind of language should a thesis statement include?” then prompted students to turn to a neighbor to discuss before asking students to share out. The lesson developed with strategically asked questions used to elicit salient information from students. However, in an algebra class students were sitting in groups of three, and working on linear equations. Students proceeded through the same equations at extremely different levels of understanding. As the teacher moved about the room, some students worked productively discussing the work; others weren't sure what to do and were off task and flipping through their notebooks trying to find notes. Although the teacher had scripted questions in his plan, questions that stimulate critical thinking and discussion were not posed to students.
- Across classrooms, teaching strategies that provided multiple entry points to engage all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) were inconsistent. For example, in an integrated co-teaching social studies class with the Aim: “Why is there a debate about the federal level minimum wage?” students were asked “Does the minimum wage impact your life?” and “How will you benefit from an increase in the minimum wage?” All students were discussing this with a partner before the teacher allowed students to share out leading to a lively discussion around the topic. However, in one English as a Second Language class, the teacher was attempting to have students understand the “Simple Present” using daily routines of friends and relatives to demonstrate their understanding. The teacher modeled at the board, but did most of the talking while students randomly called out answers. Students were at varying levels of English language proficiency but did very little writing and speaking of the target language to practice skills.
- Across classrooms, strategies and scaffolds necessary for all students to engage in appropriately challenging tasks that demonstrated high levels of students were limited. Although it was evident that some teachers employed strategies such as strategic grouping, the use of academic language, and graphic organizers, these practices were not observed consistently.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure coherent curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and that integrate the instructional shifts to promote college and career readiness through emphasizing rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills.

### Impact

The school's curricular decisions build coherency and promote college and career readiness so that a diversity of learners including students with learning disabilities and English language learners have access to curricula and develop the necessary skills to enhance their understanding of content.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has developed a theme-based advisory program to engage ninth grade students in college and career readiness skills. The Core Pathways curriculum has units in Public Speaking, The College Planning Process, Writing to Communicate, Habits of Highly Effective Teens, Character and Conflict Resolution, and Word Processing Skills. Students rotate every six weeks and focus on each of these skills individually. This curriculum was developed by faculty and is informed through the work of professional learning communities to ensure alignment of skills to CCLS and development of tasks that incorporate these skills.
- The school has adapted the College Board SpringBoard Math curriculum that is aligned to CCLS and incorporates the instructional shifts. In addition, the school has purchased texts that provide for text complexity for college and career readiness. The school has strategically incorporated writing across the curricula and identified key skills across grades to enhance student writing. The English language arts curriculum incorporates a research paper in every grade leading up to a major research paper project in the eleventh grade. Skills such as annotating and learning to write thesis statements have been reinforced so that students utilize these skills with proficiency by the twelfth grade.
- Across subjects and grades, unit plans reflected differentiation strategies using the Understanding by Design principles. Plans included Essential Questions, key content and common core learning standards, student objectives, learning activities, and assessments. Lesson plans reviewed included question aims such as, "How did groups in the U.S. react to the Indian Removal Act?" and the motivations like "How can we compare the Indian Removal Act of 1830 to gentrification of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?" In an economics lesson the aim was, "Why is there a debate about the federal level minimum wage?" and the motivation was, "Describe the quality of life that the current minimum wage offers and identify the arguments surrounding the debate about the minimum wage."

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula to provide actionable feedback and to adjust curricula and instruction.

### **Impact**

Feedback to students and analysis of common assessments have driven cycles of curricula modifications to support students' progress toward goals.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The review of bulletin boards across the school displayed student work, included rubrics and feedback to students that was actionable, and provided clear next steps for growth. For instance, on a bulletin board for an English language arts assignment, each student had feedback aligned to the attached rubric that highlighted strengths and offered comments to improve the work.
- Teachers work in teams to develop common assessments and task specific rubrics to drive instructional adjustments and use the results to develop support for identified student needs. For example, analysis from 2013-2014 English language arts assessment data, and student performance outcomes on summative assessments informed the curricula design and revisions across content areas for the 2014-2015 school year, and led to the school-wide focus on academic vocabulary and writing.
- School leaders analyze student scholarship data to modify programs to ensure students receive targeted support through Regents prep courses and modified core courses that review foundational skills. In addition, the school uses baseline assessments to conduct gap analysis to develop interventions and to inform curriculum enhancements. For example in a Common Core algebra course, after analyzing MoSL baseline assessments, the math department revised curricula and developed benchmark assessments aligned to the Algebra Regents Examination to ensure students mastered previously taught material and to identify topics that had to be retaught.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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**Findings**

Teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations, which promote the achievement of school goals, strengthen teacher capacity, and promote teacher leadership so that they have a voice in key decisions across the school.

**Impact**

The school has various teams that that work collaboratively with school leaders to support school wide goals and to increase student achievement.

**Supporting Evidence**

- All teachers participate in Professional Learning Communities as well as in twice weekly common planning. The various teacher teams include School Culture teacher teams, Pedagogical Professional Learning Communities, Subject Area Curriculum teams, and Expanded Success Initiative Planning team. In a teacher team meeting that was observed, teachers stated, “The pedagogical PLCs and Subject Area Curriculum Teams directly address implementation of Common Core Learning Standards.”
- Through a School Based Option, teachers chose to meet weekly in one of six areas decided as high need areas for growth and aligned to school-wide goals. The areas identified were new clubs to meet diverse interest of students, Peer Mentoring, Student Government Organization/Student Voice, 12th Grade Student Targeted Interventions, Math and Science Tutoring/ Study Hall and Computer Lab, School-wide Communications and Marketing. School leaders articulated that this teacher led initiative contributes to setting and maintaining high standards, promoting college and career readiness, as well as providing leadership opportunities for students. In addition, teachers articulated that participating in these teams has led to changes in curricula and to the practice of promoting student voice in their classrooms to promote student leadership.
- Teachers highlighted work that was done collaboratively with English as a Second Language teachers and English language arts (ELA) teachers to analyze standards and areas for critical focus, including language and grammar targets and developing curricula maps and unit plans to integrate skills across grades and classrooms to support students in meeting the college readiness metric of ELA Regents exams. A teacher stated that the sharing and collaboration has helped her develop better lesson plans that meet the needs of her students. Teachers also referenced how teacher collaboration was aligned to school goals. For example, they cited the focus on the twelfth grade PLC around students at-risk of not graduating and the interventions that were being put in place and how that focus informed the refinements of unit plans in ELA to incorporate more non-fiction text and argumentative writing to complement the literature being taught.