



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Beacon High School**

**High School M479**

**227 West 61<sup>st</sup> Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10023**

**Principal: Ruth Lacey**

**Date of review: December 17, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Musa Ali Shama**

## The School Context

Beacon High School is a high school with 1,275 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 13.6% Black, 22.7% Hispanic, 49% White, and 8.7% Asian students. The student body includes .08% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 35% of the students enrolled and girls account for 65%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.4%.

## 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>Celebration</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>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty have strategically developed and refined curricula that integrate the instructional shifts, content, and Common Core learning standards to provide coherent and challenging courses of study across disciplines and grades, promoting college and career readiness for all students.

### Impact

Students are engaged in rigorous courses of study across grades and subject areas that lead to a 99% graduation rate with 81% of students meeting the 4-Year College Readiness Index and 89% of students meeting the College and Career Preparatory Course Index.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty have developed rigorous courses of study that promote college and career readiness for all students by strategically integrating the instructional shifts which has resulted in coherence across grades and subjects areas. Courses of study are structured into 3 tiers starting with foundational in the ninth grade, college preparatory in tenth through twelfth grades, and college level for students taking college level course work in the eleventh and twelfth grade. Courses are designed to integrate skills-building with content complexity by incorporating the Common Core learning standards (CCLS) in tasks. Unit plans and lesson plans reviewed demonstrated alignment to CCLS and highlighted instructional shifts that were the focus of the Unit. For example, an English language arts (ELA) unit plan detailed ELA Shift 2 and the use of having students engage in reading non-fiction complex texts and in rich conversations using the text. Plans incorporated resources, strategies, and culminating tasks with rubrics.
- Curricula across subject areas and grades consistently emphasized rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills. For example, in a eleventh grade US History class learning about the “Political, Economic, and Cultural Implications of Manifest Destiny,” students were developing arguments to engage in a debate by analyzing primary and secondary sources related to Manifest Destiny. They were required to establish a claim based on their analysis of the documents. In a twelfth grade English language arts (ELA) class, students were reading “From the Uses of Enchantment, by Bruno Bettelheim” and were required to annotate the text and engage in a text-based discussion utilizing the psychoanalytic terminology that was embedded in the text. In a ninth grade ELA class, students were engaged in a Unit with the Essential Question “Is History subjective or objective?” Students were comparing and contrasting two poems and the plan had students work in groups to analyze the poems and to discuss the portrayal of slavery and the impact of the use of language and imagery.
- Students are engaged in a systematic approach to achieve college level writing skills using multiple sources, including fiction, non-fiction, on-line databases, and oral interviews starting in the ninth grade. Students articulated that multiple times a year they are required to do research and write essays and follow the MLA format. Students also stated that they are required to do presentations in most of their classes.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

### Impact

Teaching practices across classrooms promoted high levels of student engagement that were reflected in student work products, by student discourse, and by ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Leadership articulated a belief that students learn best by promoting autonomy and collaboration and engaging students in inquiry so that they learn by seeking the answers to complex questions and by critically analyzing sources to gain deep understanding of the content. Across classrooms this belief was evident. For example; in a tenth grade social studies class students were preparing to debate positions in a Middle East Peace Initiative by participating in role-play activity. Students were divided into delegations, and each group was preparing to present their position and negotiate with other delegations to come to a compromise. Students utilized notes they had prepared from research they did prior to the lesson on the Middle East region and past peace proposals. In a Spanish class, students rotated through stations that represented different environments and engaged in dialogue in the target language by asking each other questions. The lesson concluded with students creating a mini-story of their experience collaboratively. However, this high level of student engagement was not observed across all classrooms, for example in a Living Environment class students were learning about cellular respiration, and were working individually filling out worksheets and were not engaged in student-to-student discussion regarding their findings and subsequent hypotheses.
- Across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflected high levels of critical thinking leading to students' taking ownership of their learning. For example, in a performing arts class, students were in groups creating skits to express different ways to articulate setting, character, and conflict choices through their acting. Students were working independently giving each other feedback and refining their skits as the teacher facilitated groups with questions that had students reassess their decisions as well as explain their thought process. In an English language arts class, students were discussing a rich text, citing lines within the text to support their claims. Students used accountable talk stems such as "I agree with..." to build on claims or "I disagree..." leading to a high level of student engagement as the teacher guided the conversations with questions that enhanced the discussion. This level of student participation was not consistent across the vast majority classrooms visited. For example, in a U.S. history class, a teacher was at the front of the room delivering the lesson as students sat passively listening, and few high level questions were posed to students that would have stimulated high order thinking skills, but rather asked recall questions that went from student to teacher.
- Teachers that were present in teacher interviews expressed their goals of creating student centered classrooms by engaging students in discourse, having them grapple with complex texts, and having students write using multiple sources. They refined their practice through implementation of strategies informed by Danielson Framework for Teaching.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

The strategic use of assessments across all grades and subject areas allows for ongoing adjustments to planning and instruction, meaningful and actionable feedback to students and teachers, and provides a clear picture of student progress towards mastery.

### Impact

Assessments are utilized to create a clear portrait of student mastery that leads to increased student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers work collaboratively in their departments to develop tasks and performance-based assessments aligned to the NY Performance Standards Consortium. Students take performance-based assessments in every academic subject in every grade. Teachers use this data to inform curricula modifications, and to provide meaningful and actionable feedback to students. Student work reviewed from a tenth grade English class offered detailed next steps, aligned to the rubric, for students to improve the quality of the assignments. All students interviewed substantiated that teachers used rubrics in all of their classes for all their assignments and provided clear feedback that allowed them to improve the quality of their work.
- Across grades and subject areas, performance-based assessments have been developed that create a clear picture of student progress. For example, in English language arts, freshman students are required to complete a five-paragraph essay; in the sophomore year they create a critical analysis essay; in their junior year, a guided research paper, and in senior year; an independent research paper. Teachers structure the time within each phase of the assignment to provide actionable and meaningful feedback to support students in refining their work, leading to higher quality work products. Progress is tracked and leads to instructional and curricula modifications so that all students demonstrate increased mastery of the skills and expectations incorporated into these assessments.
- Teachers work collaboratively in departments to refine rubrics and modify curricula based on looking at student work. A review of the history curriculum revealed a process of incorporating lessons to improve student writing using multiple sources after examination of 12<sup>th</sup> grade assessments. Teachers described how they identified gaps in student writing and mapped writing skills backwards to the ninth grade to make sure appropriate scaffolding was in place to ensure students were meeting college level writing standards. School leaders articulated a cycle of looking at strategically scheduled assessments to analyze results that allowed them to provide targeted support to students. A student stated that a teacher went over their mid-term project with them, and it helped her understand how to improve her work.

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

School leaders effectively communicate high expectations to the school community and provide the training and support to create a college-bound culture built on mutual accountability for those expectations.

### Impact

The principal and faculty have established a culture of high expectations, building strong support for college and career readiness and engaging students and families in partnerships that prepare students for success at the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have systems in place to consistently communicate and reinforce high expectations. They are documented in the faculty handbook and new teacher handbook that includes the school vision, reference to Common Core learning standards, information regarding performance-based assessment requirements, as well as policies and procedures regarding professionalism. School leaders set goals, design professional development, and implement professional learning opportunities with staff through ongoing dialogue with teacher leaders regarding teaching strategies aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. A new teacher induction provides those new to the profession or the school with an orientation beginning at The Summer Bridge program. In addition, new teachers are assigned a mentor to support them the first year. Systems of feedback, teacher reflection, teacher meetings were all clearly documented in binders and online systems that evidenced the use of protocols to ensure teacher productivity and clear next steps for follow up.
- The school hosts a curriculum night annually that provides the time for faculty members to introduce themselves and their pedagogy, describe their coursework, and to outline the grading policy to their students' parents. The evening initiates partnerships with parents that begin to foster relationships, establish a point of contact, and provide a scope for the course syllabus so parents can support students in meeting the expectations set by teachers and the school. Teachers write anecdotal reports twice a year to inform parents of the progress their children are making, and parents have the opportunity to meet with their child's advisor to address concerns and set goals. Beacon also utilizes a custom, online student management system that allows parents to view a child's homework and grades.
- The college office plays a prominent role in school culture and provides layers of communication and support to parents and students in the college exploration, application, acceptance, and financial aid process. Student engagement regarding the college admissions begins in the sophomore year, starting with the PSAT and free PSAT prep workshops for students. A financial aid night is provided for tenth grade parents to inform them of the requirements and parameters of financial aid and cost of a post-secondary degree. Sophomores are required to participate in a community service activity that is supported by the school's community service program. A college planning guide is posted on the school's website and provides detailed information for students and families, and maintains a calendar of workshops, college trips, deadlines, and other information to keep students and parents aware of the expectations connected to college and career readiness.

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

Distributed leadership structures are embeded in school culture leading to teachers having a voice in key decisions that promote the acheivement of school goals and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers.

**Impact**

Teacher collaborations and voice have led to the development and refinement of rigorous curricula, instructional coherence, aligned assessments, and strategic decision-making that has affected student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers participate in department teams, grade-level teams, and interdisciplinary teams to work collaboratively to develop and refine curricula, assessments, and discuss instructional strategies in order to promote the achievement of school goals. Teachers in the English department worked collaboratively to strategically integrate the instructional shifts and Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) across the curriculum to incorporate a scaffolded approach to college readiness skills and to build coherence across grades. This work stimulated discussions in social studies department that resulted in social studies teachers are refining their maps to incorporate ELA CCLS into tasks and projects. Teachers articulated that the ongoing conversation between departmental teams and the interdisciplinary team to identify opportunities for skills across grades and subject areas to be aligned in order to reinforce targeted skills in order to improve student achievement.
- School leaders engage teachers to promote leadership opportunities and to ensure that there is teacher voice in key decisions that affect student learning. Highlighted by both teachers and administration was the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) that facilitates each department team and coordinates grade level teamwork. The ASC committee is comprised of members of each department, Special Education Coordinator, and other faculty members that provide pupil personnel service and school administration. Agendas are developed collaboratively and turn-keyed in team meetings. In addition, concerns, suggestions, requests for professional development and resources are brought back to be discussed at ASC meetings. Teachers expressed a high level of support from administration regarding the responsiveness of teacher requests. Teachers highlighted academic initiatives such as identifying plagiarism, revising the anecdotal process, proposing the uniform on-line grading system, enforcing a technology policy, and maximizing Consortium involvement as some of the outcomes of the work developed by the ASC.
- Grade level and department team members highlighted several initiatives that they have been involved in that promote school-wide instructional coherence such as, setting uniform homework and assessment expectations for each course, planning and engaging in peer classroom visitations, developing strategies related to multiple entry points, high level questions and discussions, and using outside sources when writing essays. Members of the grade teams updated performance based assessment rubrics and refined and published scope and sequence documents for course work across grades.