

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Satellite Academy High School**

**High School M570**

**120 West 30 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10001**

**Principal: Steven Zbaida**

**Dates of review: March 11, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Teresa Caccavale**

## The School Context

Satellite Academy is a high school with 266 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 31% Black, 64% Hispanic, 3% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 77.6%.

## School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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>

### School Culture

<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>Well Developed</b>

### Systems for Improvement

<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:**

**3.4 High Expectations**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

High expectations are systematically communicated to the entire school community including teachers, students and parents via several modes of communication. The school implements professional development conducts parent workshops and provides meaningful feedback to promote a positive partnership with families to students on a path of college and career readiness.

### Impact

Structures that support high expectations across all constituencies result in a culture of mutual accountability between the school and families and promote an environment where all students have ownership over their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- All incoming students and parents or guardians are required to attend an information session regarding the school's expectations of them as students and members of the school community. The purpose of the orientation meeting is to inform students and parents about rigorous assessments, the path to graduation and other requirements students will have to fulfill to graduate. Additionally, all students must commit to a minimum of a year and a half to complete all the requirements of the school's program, regardless of credits or Regents exams they have already completed.
- The school provides rigorous orientation classes to new students in English, math, science and social studies during their first semester in attendance. The orientation program is designed to support students as they adjust to the community, improve classroom and interpersonal skills and help them reflect on prior successes and failures in school. Students are also immersed in the school's "Habits of Mind" to promote complex and critical thinking skills.
- The students receive progress reports every two weeks and these progress reports are also sent home. Students and parents or guardians are also given access to Focus, the school's computer-based student information program which allows them to check-in on student progress at any time.
- The school offers parent school nights as well as an open house for all parents and guardians of returning students. The purpose of these information evenings is to re-orient parents or guardians to the high expectations for all students. Parents have the opportunity to visit different classrooms and participate in learning experiences that are like the ones their children experience every day as part of the rigorous curriculum. Additionally parents can speak with teachers and view curriculum documents during these events.
- Every student is assigned an advisor who supports students in their academic journey. Advisors speak regularly to parents and check-in with students weekly regarding their progress and future goals. Students are also assigned to advisory groups where they explore college and career options as part of the curriculum as well as attend college visits. The school also employs an additional college advisor who focuses on supporting seniors in the college application progress. Students receive one-on-one counseling with this advisor who works collaboratively with the students' other advisors as well as the students' families to keep all constituents apprised of the students' college and career readiness. The college advisor also runs workshops to support students in their navigation of the college application process and in the completion of documents for college application. Additionally she organizes two college trips a year for the entire student body.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms teaching practices fully align to the school's curricula and embed the instructional shifts with student work products and discussion that reflect critical thinking, participation and ownership, however, targeted students can benefit from additional strategic supports.

### Impact

Students take ownership of their own learning and produce meaningful work products, yet there are some missed opportunities for all learners to demonstrate critical and analytical thinking at the highest levels of participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classroom, teaching practices reflect the common belief that students need to be cognitively engaged in their learning through their participation in high-level discussions, this was evident across all classrooms and subjects including English, social studies, math and science. All lessons observed included multiple strategies supporting focused discussions including quick writes, turn and talk and collaboration with partners or in small group work.
- During an English class students were observed demonstrating an understanding of types of conflict by identifying the main conflict represented in Chapter 2 of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Students were analyzing how the author develops the conflict and making predictions about the story's outcome. Through the strategy of turn and talk partnerships discussed the conflict of the characters as well as other conflicts in the story. While reading aloud from the novel, the teacher interrupted them at strategic points to ask pivotal questions about the passage including: When Lola says "She was holding onto me like I was her last nickel" what does this say about the mother? Student answered questions during the breaks in reading thereby demonstrating how they analyze the way complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters and add value to the plot.
- Social studies classes observed revealed students employing critical thinking skills as a habit of mind considering different viewpoints using evidence from text and videos, making connections and seeking significance. For example, in one class, students were observed analyzing the philosophies of Gandhi and Fanon and explaining the reasoning behind them as they explored the essential question: How can we effectively respond to oppression? Students were observed engaging in meaningful conversations with their peers using primary source materials to think deeply about the different political viewpoints. Similarly, in a Civil Rights Movement class students were looking at the first day African Americans attended Little Rock Central High School in September 1957. Specifically, they were looking at the viewpoints of different students, the choices they made that day, and the consequences of these choices. In both classes students worked in groups and were provided with scaffold supports including graphic organizers, visuals, discussion prompts and extensions.
- During a science inquiry as part of a performance based assessment (PBA) task, students were working in groups simulating the PBA process by making qualitative and quantitative observations using a Venn diagram to observe and record data on the effects of adding water to different kinds of sand. They formulated a hypothesis while identifying independent and dependent variables. Students were also observed critiquing the experiment to ascertain whether the experiment was conducted correctly building on their prior knowledge of the scientific method.
- Across math classes students worked in groups collecting and graphing data to see trends and interpret the relationship between experimental and theoretical probability and discussed and asked questions to interpret data based on real life contexts, however students would benefit from additional extensions to support students in making deeper connections between the concepts and real world application to extend their thinking beyond the tasks.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Strategic curricula decisions made by school leaders and faculty have resulted in coherence and alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards across subject areas. Teacher use student work and relevant data to make adjustments to curricula and tasks that has closed the achievement gap and increased cognitive engagement for all learners.

### Impact

Rigorous habits are embedded across classrooms, within units and tasks that require all learners, including student subgroups, to think critically and create their own meaning through evidence based expectations. Teachers use student data to ensure all learners have access to curricula and instructional tasks that are cognitively challenging and demonstrate rigor and higher order thinking skills.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school's curriculum is aligned to the NYC Consortium standards, Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. As a Consortium school teachers design and implement units of study that engage students in PBA tasks. With PBAs as an end goal, the teachers use backwards planning to develop a path to graduation in each department to ensure students attain a high level of academic performance and ultimately succeed in college and careers. A review of unit and lesson plans revealed that every department infuses reading, writing and the use of textual evidence to support claims. Furthermore, teachers work tirelessly to refine academic tasks to give all students access to the content and support them in the successful completion of their performance tasks.
- As a member of the NY Performance Standards Consortium the rigorous courses and performance tasks offered at the school students must complete for graduation are aligned to their rubrics and the Common Core that promotes high levels of student thinking and participation. Teachers complete course outlines using the Understanding by Design framework. Within this framework they think through the Common Core and content learning standards to be addressed during a particular course. Habits of Mind, which promote higher order thinking skills, are infused throughout the written unit and lesson plans. These skills include using evidence, considering viewpoints, making connections, seeking significance, asking 'what if' and reflection. Utilization of the Depth of Knowledge scale further supports thinking around the kinds of questions, activities and assessments to challenge students to think deeply and critically about the topics they study in class.
- Planning is further refined using data from student work and assessments including conferring notes, exit slips and formative and summative tasks allowing for all students including highest and lowest achieving, English language learners and special education students to have access to curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging. Teachers develop differentiated planning pages that articulate different scaffolds, activities and resources to engage groups of students. These include flexible grouping, guided group activities, leveled readings, differentiated tasks and manipulatives resulting in access for all students to curriculum across subject areas.

**Findings**

School leaders and teachers consistently use and adjust curricula aligned assessment practices, grading policies and pedagogical strategies that focus on checks for understanding to create a clear portrait for students and staff regarding student progress.

**Impact**

Data driven decisions are made school wide leading to rigorous curricula adjustments at the teacher team and classroom levels, and student self-assessment tools guide instructional decisions and provide clear and actionable learning targets for all learners.

**Supporting Evidence**

- All departments collect data from interim assessments, which are captured in Focus, the school-wide database. This data allows school leaders, departments' lead teachers and faculty to identify and understand students' strengths and areas of focus. Teachers use data from classroom assessments and interim assessments to make instructional shifts to better address all students learning needs. The result of this work is students are better ready for the PBA tasks. Current data also reveals higher passing rates for PBAs and an increased instructional alignment throughout the school.
- PBAs allow students choice in terms of topic and ways to approach developing their work. Teachers work with students to refine academic tasks to ensure all students have access to the content and targeted support. Senior level PBAs, which are cumulative assessments in each discipline, align with the instructional shifts articulated by the Common Core. These projects require students to delve deeply and think critically into an area of study, to draw on text-based evidence to support arguments and articulate counter arguments, to apply their learning, and to utilize academic understanding. Students are expected to demonstrate a deep understanding of the content area related to their area of studying order to defend their final assessments to a panel of adults. Furthermore, these assessments allow students to perform and achieve at their varying levels and paces as opposed to the traditional high states tests that take place in most high schools.
- Departments review paths to graduation yearly and back-map the skills students will need at each stage of their learning experience. The maps articulate the Common Core skills students will engage in at each level within a subject area. Additionally, each department reviews the interim assessments every year to refresh and revise their assignments. The students complete five interim assessments beginning with a diagnostic and ending with an extensive performance based assessment in each subject area. These assessments are aligned to the Common Core and NY Standards-Based Consortium rubrics. All teachers within each department work collaboratively on these assessments and align their classes to ensure that the skills assessed at each benchmark are taught. For example, teachers have examined English language arts Regents data as well as interim assessment data which revealed it would be beneficial for students to have a focus on literacy across all departments.
- The school has an orientation assessment for students new to the school. This orientation session also has students complete an end of semester reflection on work completed during their first semester at the school. This is an opportunity for students to reflect on their growth over their first semester and plan their future goals for learning.

<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

All teachers are engaged in robust and collaborative inquiry based professional learning teams and study groups. Embedded leadership structures encourage teachers' voice in key decisions from planning curricula to improving practices and student achievement.

### Impact

the work of teacher teams have resulted in a school-wide shift towards student centered instruction and coherence leading to higher academic achievement. Teachers are empowered to play an integral role in key decisions that impact student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in Inquiry teams every other week to focus on their respective inquiry questions and to examine student data. Teachers use this data to make necessary adjustments to better serve the needs of different students in their classes. For example they revise criteria in rubrics thereby providing students with clear and specific expectations for the task they are working on. These rubrics have helped students support their claims to make clear arguments in writing. Revisions to lessons included a discussion process or exit slip at the end of class, for example in math students write a paragraph or more explaining one simple formula or write a letter explaining how they would teach someone who doesn't know anything about the topic. At the end of a larger inquiry cycle each department presents their inquiry process and findings. This presentation is part of the school's structured review plan and part of the teacher evaluation process.
- Teachers meet weekly to collaborate and share ideas. In the first semester teachers meet in orientation teams to share curricula, co-plan, discuss student interventions and share best practices to support the newest students in the school community. The teams use two information gathering tools; one to track student concerns and interventions taken and the other to outline teacher curricular plans for the semester. The teachers also take notes in a Google folder. The tools and notes are available for review by teachers and administration. Department teams also meet weekly to discuss curriculum, alignment and interim assessments which are common core aligned. During team meetings teachers align assessments to the instructional shifts and the skills articulated by the shifts are often topics covered during department team meetings as they plan ways to effectively challenge the students.
- Professional development is created through a shared decision making process. Input for how the school develops their professional development plan comes from different sources of data and pedagogical practices are identified through administrator observations, peer observations and teacher surveys. There is a staff planning committee that meets weekly and is made up of one teacher from each department and one administrator. In addition to the staff planning committee teachers are afforded the opportunity to serve as leaders in other teacher team meetings. Furthermore the staff has a visitation initiative in place and uses it as a vehicle to identify pedagogical strengths as well as providing ongoing feedback to one another. Currently the school is focusing on increasing the overall pedagogical effectiveness of the teaching staff through discussions of best practices and engaging in pedagogical discussions on a variety of topics such as differentiation, literacy practices, class discussion techniques, higher order questioning and assessment.