



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Humanities Preparatory Academy**

**High School M605**

**3512 West 18th Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10011**

**Principal: Jeannie Ferrari**

**Date of review: January 15, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: LaShawn Robinson**

## The School Context

Humanities Prep Academy is a transfer school with 208 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 29% Black, 55% Hispanic, 9% White, 4% Asian, 3% multi-racial students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 84.9%.

## 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>Additional Findings</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>Focus</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>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

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

### Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with families to ensure that students take responsibility for their learning.

### Impact

High expectations and strong systems of communication result in collaborative partnerships between school leaders, teachers, staff, external partners, parents, and students which effectively support a path for college and career readiness and ensure that students are well prepared for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal is committed to ensuring that 100% of students plan for college and envision the kind of college environment that is best for them so that students can develop successful post-secondary plans. The student advisors ensure that all students are building a college resume, exploring options, and internalizing college readiness standards. All seniors are required to apply to college and are supported through this process. Additionally, as part of the advisory requirements, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are expected to become involved in after-school programs or college readiness programs. The principal has arranged for students to receive intensive support and guidance throughout the college process. Currently there are two college guidance counselors and two volunteer staff working in the college office. The counselors work with families, students and teachers to track student progress towards college, host family nights, assist with applications and financial aid, coordinate college visits, and meet one-on-one with parents to help navigate the college application process. Additionally, a full-time social worker assists immigrant families with finding the right support to afford college. Parents described that the school is supporting their children to meet college and career readiness expectations, through the work they are completing in the school. As a result of these expectations and support, over 2/3 of the students attend college within 6 months after graduation and the percentage of students enrolled in college has increased over the past 3 years; moreover, 90% of this year's graduating cohort is on track to enroll in college by September of 2015.
- Through supportive partnerships, the school has been able to prepare students for college and careers. The school has a partnership with Baruch and Hunter College, which afford 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students the opportunity to take free college classes. Approximately 35% of the students are involved in College Now. All students that meet the College Now criteria apply to the program. In addition, a partnership with College Access: Research and Action (CARA) helped to develop a "College Bridge" program, where a Humanities Preparatory alumni works with college bound students over the summer to create a successful transition. All 9<sup>th</sup> graders are required to apply for the SEO college prep program, or similar program. The school also hosts an alumni day, where 30 alumni come to share their college experience and advise current students about how to be successful in college.
- The school expects all students to be prepared for the rigors of college level work. To achieve this, the school uses the portfolio based-assessment (PBAT) process to push students to develop college-level assignments and to familiarize themselves with college expectations. The principal described that 100% of alumni returning to visit the school shared that the PBAT process prepared them for the rigor of college work.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

The school leader and teachers use common assessments and rubrics that are aligned to the school's curricula and analyze them to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subjects and to inform pedagogical decisions at the classroom level.

### Impact

Assessment practices provide actionable feedback to students and teachers and promote content mastery for all learners. However, there were missed opportunities for classroom level assessment of student understanding and effective instructional adjustments, thus hindering opportunities for students to demonstrate increased mastery.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school monitors and reflects on their assessment practices through the inquiry process. The principal described that student work is constantly brought to the inquiry meetings so teachers are able to analyze student work and reflect on whether or not assessment practices align with course objectives and expectations. During the teacher team meeting, teachers utilized a protocol to evaluate the instructional task and the quality of student work. This process is a common practice for the school. Teachers explained that through conducting item analysis of the English language arts Regents, they have been able to identify that students struggled with vocabulary and the critical lens essays. The principal also shared that after completing Performance-based Assessment Tasks (PBAT) item analysis, reading comprehension emerged as an area of focus. For this reason, they are focusing on annotation and on embedding literacy strategies across content areas in order to foster content mastery.
- Courses culminating in PBATs are aligned to the PBAT rubric and all other assessments in the course lead to this product, which is supporting college and career readiness for students. In order to develop common expectations around assessment, the school developed "pre-PBAT" or gateway rubrics to allow students in grades 9 and 10 to assess their progress towards PBAT/college readiness in each discipline. During the meeting with students, they explained that they are expected to self- and peer- assess using rubrics prior to submitting final papers.
- As part of the advisory program, the school holds student-led conferences, where students organize a portfolio of assessments (often project-based) and are expected to reflect on their growth and challenge areas. These conferences take place during family conferences. The principal described that, in addition to student performance-based projects, 10% of a students' grade is based on work habits since they expect students to be prepared for the demands of college. Student grades are posted on Jupiter Grades, an online grading book, so that students and parents can access student performance data and monitor progress. Parents described that they are very pleased with the online grading system and with communication from teachers in reference to student progress and needs.
- Although teachers conduct item analysis of students' performance there are missed opportunities for classroom level assessment of student understanding and deepening the practice of offering students feedback. During classroom visits, some teachers did not complete a formal lesson closure or an exit activity to determine student understanding or to identify learning gaps. During another class visit, students struggled with the content presented and the teacher did not adjust the lesson to meet the needs of the students, thus limiting student understanding.

## Additional Findings

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

### Findings

Teachers ensure that curricula and tasks across subjects are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and New York Performance Standards Consortium rubrics and are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

Across grades and subject areas, effective curriculum development and revision practices build coherence that promotes college and career readiness for all students. All students have access to curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school community engages in professional development to review Common Core Learning Standards. Through this review process, teachers discuss where the standards 'live' in each content area and determine priorities to meet the demands of Common Core. For example, in math, the department focuses on engaging students in understanding how to arrive at a mathematical solution in multiple ways and on infusing writing as a strategy so that students can explain their mathematical thinking. Teachers also discuss suggested texts to engage students as part of the school's focus on reading, and reviewed model lessons posted in the Common Core library. This is an ongoing process for teachers to revisit the Standards every year and discuss how to better align curricula and tasks in order to ensure that all students have access to career and college ready learning experiences.
- All curricula are aligned to the New York Performance Standards Consortium PBAT Rubrics, which ensure that students meet college level standards in all academic subjects. During the summer, teachers begin to develop and revise curriculum in departments and throughout the year, teacher teams use the results of PBATs and Regents assessments to inform curriculum development. In addition, the school leader and teachers review vertical curricula, scope and sequences and determine which skills and content are essential for students to know and be able to do. The school believes in 'depth over breath' so they spend a great deal of time determining which content will be covered and noting the instructional benchmarks and shifts. As a result of the detailed attention to curriculum mapping, in which teachers are required to delineate essential questions, content goals and skills goals, and student support, ranging from differentiation strategies to peer assessments and student led conferences, the school was able to achieve an 85% 6 year graduation rate during the 2013-14 school year, the highest for any transfer high school.
- Courses are planned and designed considering student needs, interest, and focus areas determined by department and school goals. The special education team uses Universal Design for Learning to ensure multiple entry points and multiple intelligences for diverse learners. This team also works with teachers to design scaffolds and supports so that all learners can master Common Core expectations. Courses are developed to spark student interest and better meet the needs of a diverse population and range in proficiency levels. For example, all grade 9 students partake in an interactive "Big History" course, which is a science and social studies interdisciplinary course. Some of the essential questions covered are: "How has the universe and life within it grown more complex over the past 13.7 billion years?; Why study the history of the universe from the beginning?" This course was designed by researchers at the University of Michigan and engages students with a holistic timeline of major events and discoveries from the ancient to the modern world, allowing students to develop connections between historical events and scientific breakthroughs.

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|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.2 Pedagogy</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|

### Findings

Teacher pedagogy demonstrates consistent instructional coherence which is aligned to the curricula and informed by the Danielson Framework, thereby providing opportunities to maximize learning.

### Impact

All students are intellectually engaged in rigorous content and student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers in the school share a common belief that students learn best by engaging in inquiry-based activities, collaboration, and through active engagement. Teachers consistently align curricula and instructional expectations with Common Core standards. During classroom visits, it was evident that teachers develop detailed lesson plans and prepare a variety of activities to engage all learners with the content being presented. Students were involved in reading high level texts, annotating, inquiry-based projects, and utilizing rubrics for peer reviews. For instance, science students were conducting experiments in small groups and were collecting data and conducting research to either support or disprove their hypothesis. One of the student inquiry questions was, “How does playing video games affect reaction time?” Another group conducted an experiment to determine if brown sugar was less harmful than processed sugar. In an English class, students were working to complete an essay exploring the theme of “What is a tragic hero?”. During this lesson, students were provided with a rubric for paragraph development and were asked to exchange papers with a classmate in order to provide feedback using a specific protocol. As a result of these practices, students were challenged to think at high levels across classrooms as evidenced in student discussion and written products.
- The school is focused on literacy to improve students’ reading and writing skills and comprehension. Throughout the lessons, students were observed actively annotating text. Some of the teachers implemented the annotation strategy to help students with comprehension and to provide feedback to their peers. Shared literacy strategies across classrooms have been successful with struggling readers, English language learners and students with disabilities. As a result of these efforts, the school achieved a 76% pass rate on the English Regents during the 2013-2014 school year.
- Students were cognitively challenged and engaged in learning activities that required them to make predictions, hypothesize, problem solve and demonstrate their thinking through writing and discussion. For example, in an English class visited, students analyzed the craft and structure of Dickens’ writing and made comparisons to their own writing style. In history classes, students were defending a thesis using primary and secondary sources as evidence and debating whether the United States criminal justice system is a just system in another class.

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

**Findings**

The vast majority of teachers are part of professional collaborations that engage in inquiry work, research best practices aligned to school goals and instructional shifts, and analyze teacher practice and student work.

**Impact**

School-wide instructional coherence in teacher practice and mastery of goals for students is evident.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher leadership and development are promoted through structured professional collaborations. In addition to the principal’s cabinet, there are four structures for team collaboration in the school: inquiry teams, department teams, peer observation teams, and committee teams. Department teams focus on curriculum development and adjustment and committee teams support school operations or address an area of interest for school improvement or adjustment. The inquiry team is focused on examining student work products through structured protocols. Additionally, teachers research best practices and analyze assessment data trends in order to make instructional shifts. For instance, the inquiry team researched best practices to improve literacy skills and identified schools across the country that were successful at improving student outcomes in literacy, such as Brockton High School in Boston. The school adapted the literacy strategies that were implemented in this high school including embedding instructional practices from the book, “What to Do When You Read.” During the inquiry meeting observed, teachers used a collaborative assessment conference protocol to review student writing products. Teachers shared low inference observations about the student writing and assessed their progress in terms of the implementation of a common writing structure, which is currently being integrated in English and history. As a result of inquiry work and school’s coherence in reading strategies across content areas, Regents pass rates increased by 20% from 2012.
- All teams have a clear focus that is connected to the school goals and improving student learning outcomes. Currently, department teams focus on developing and revising the pre-PBAT/Gateway rubrics to better prepare students for the culminating performance tasks. In addition, teachers have developed common reading and writing practices across the school, such as school-wide annotation strategies and writing templates, to continue improvements in student writing skills as they prepare for college and careers.
- The school is a PROSE school with a focus on peer observation. The Peer Observation Teacher Team developed a structured peer observation protocol as part of the teacher observation process. Peer observation teams are comprised of 3-4 teachers, with at least one very experienced, highly effective teacher. The observation team is focused on Danielson 3d: using assessment in instruction. Additionally, they focus on two other components, selected by teachers as part of their annual goals. Teachers are excited about the opportunity to share instructional practices and the support they are receiving from colleagues. A teacher explained, “The peer feedback has helped us to grow. We schedule visits. We look to our colleagues for support. This group has been helpful.” Another teacher explained, “(During) my first year, I just had a mentor...having this structure, I have more people giving me feedback and advice on assessment and classroom management. Our observations are now more focused on content, not just pedagogy, this helps with differentiation. I appreciate that people bring content expertise into the feedback provided.”