



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

High School of Graphic Communication Arts

High School M625

**439 West 49th Street
New York
NY 10019**

Principal: Brendan Lyons

**Date of review: January 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Fred Walsh**

The School Context

High School of Graphic Communication Arts is a high school with 341 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 38% Black 59% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 65.00%.

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	Developing
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	---	----------------	-------------------

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

Teacher teams are aiding in the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Lesson study and analysis of student work is resulting in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in daily subject area teams to collaboratively address student performance data. Meetings are facilitated by teachers and consultants from Teaching Matters Inc. Aspects of the work include implementing Common Core Learning Standards and associated instructional shifts, review of assessment data, and creation of six week action plans which originated as an outgrowth of teacher teams' work. For example, teachers provided constructive feedback on the feedback written on student's work. Teachers suggested that more specific feedback be given to include how a student can improve the quality of work.
- In a social studies team meeting, facilitated by Teaching Matters Inc., teachers reviewed lesson plans and corresponding student work. Teachers shared feedback on their colleague's lesson plans and provided suggested revisions, with the goal of increased student outcomes. For example, the team identified the need for modeling, using varied-level texts, citing specific evidence and highlighting key academic vocabulary. Additionally, to improve outcomes, the team used formative classroom data to intentionally group students.
- Teachers spoke enthusiastically about the value of daily, structured time for collaboration with fellow teachers. According to all teachers interviewed, team meetings have enabled their alignment of curriculum to the Common Core, fostered meaningful conversations around teaching strategies, and promoted a data driven approach to planning. For example, teachers articulated the progress they have made in developing more ongoing checks for understanding in during lessons.
- In an English language arts team meeting, teachers used two student samples of text-based written responses from a mock English language arts Regents exam. The task required that students read a passage and identify the author's central idea and use of at least one writing strategy to develop the central idea. The team then followed a protocol which included a discussion of the work, reflection from the presenting teacher, suggestions for teaching and learning and a debrief. Both samples of student work revealed a need for re-teaching central idea, a need for purposeful student grouping and academic intervention supports.

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

The Danielson Framework for Teaching informs teaching practices; however, pedagogy does not yet sufficiently engage all students resulting in uneven student participation, marked by inconsistent quality of work and uneven completion of tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers attempt to engage students in higher order questions and genuine classroom discussion with uneven results. For example, in an eleventh grade class, the teacher taught part three of a three part Socratic seminar series around racial and gender issues. Student participation was limited to five students, with questions asked and repeated for the class by the teacher. In an eleventh grade social studies class, the teacher dominated the lesson, asking a series of questions requiring students to quickly identify the “issue” so that students had little time to interact with each other, evaluate information and create opinions and claims based on evidence.
- In the majority of classrooms visited, teachers required that students complete a Do Now assignment that supported/extended comprehension of current units of study. For example, in an earth science lesson, the warm up question asked: “In your own words, describe two steps we take in finding the epicenter of an earthquake.” Students, however, misinterpreted directions presuming that the expected warm-up response was verbal-up instead of written. In a social studies lesson, the Do Now asked students, “How would you change the issue of poor factory conditions?” and in an English lesson, the Do Now required students to analyze a quote, paraphrase it, agree or disagree, and explain their reasoning. Student written responses varied reflecting unevenness in task completion and quality across classrooms.
- Students work products inconsistently demonstrate high-level thinking or rigorous work habits. In an astronomy lesson, students worked productively in groups of three with earth and celestial sphere models to learn astronomical concepts. The group assignment included labeling their models and completing a corresponding worksheet. At the conclusion of the lesson, the majority of students completed the assigned tasks. In mathematics lessons, however, students worked independently and in groups to solve routine problems, replicating procedural steps that their teachers had modeled at the board. Additionally, the teacher had to consistently remind students to stay on task and complete assigned problems.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to CCLS. Curricula and academic tasks reflect planning to provide students access to the curricula.

Impact

Increased alignment of curricula is beginning to provide all students access to cognitively engaging curricula and tasks, across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- Conversations with the school leadership as well as a review of curriculum documents revealed that the school is still in the process of aligning curricula in all core subject areas to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards and integrating the instructional shifts. The principal pointed out the work of English language arts and social studies departments as exemplars. English language arts teachers have adopted Engage NY and Odell: Developing Core Proficiencies Curriculum. Odell focuses on higher order thinking tasks such as making evidence-based claims and close reading for textual detail. In a three day unit using the text, *Desiree's Baby*, by Kate Chopin, instructional outcomes included: annotating and preparing text-based questions, and having a student-led discussion around issues of race and gender through Socratic seminar.
- A review of curriculum documents revealed that targeted supports for students with disabilities are not always specific nor are they consistently seen across all subject areas. For example, while some teachers identified grouping students heterogeneously as a way to support all students there were no indications of how support would be provided besides the actual grouping.
- As an outgrowth of school-wide data trends, the school is implementing the Carnegie Learning mathematics curriculum. Carnegie units of study ground the study of mathematics in real world situations. The curriculum is designed to provide teachers and students with personalized learning approaches, and a range of resources to address the widely diverse needs of students. However, a review of lesson plans revealed no evidence of how plans provide varied approaches for various learning styles.

2.2 Findings

Across classrooms teachers use or create assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned to curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across subjects.

Impact

Routine review of assessment data and analysis or assessment results in timely curriculum revision and teacher reflection. Students and teachers receive actionable feedback regarding student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The use of rubrics, accompanied by specific targeted actionable feedback from teachers to students, is an established ritual for improving student achievement across the school that the principal, teachers and students were able to speak about. Student work displayed in hallways included rubrics with identified areas of strength and areas of growth. Students spoke to how they regularly use rubrics in class and with homework assignments, and how teachers confer with them to provide next steps.
- Every six to eight weeks, teachers administer interim assessments in all core subject areas and data is used by teachers to create a “Deep Dive” action plan to adjust curricula, instructional practices, and target specific students for intervention. During a team meeting, English language arts teachers explained how after studying the results of students latest writing assessments, they revisited the use of writing templates and vocabulary building strategies to address essay coherence and content.
- Teachers credited the frequent review of assessment data and “Deep Dive” action planning as a key school improvement initiative. By reviewing daily formative assessments, teachers make necessary adjustments to address student learning needs. For example, in a mathematics department meeting, a math teacher discussed his practice of posting daily assessments for students to see and for his use for grouping and re-teaching.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

High expectations are consistently communicated to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and professional development opportunities. Staff provide students with feedback, guidance, and ongoing support that help them prepare for and make college and career decisions.

Impact

A culture of learning and collaboration between staff, students, and families fosters high expectations for all and prepares students for success at the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has placed a focus on providing academically rigorous activities to students as gauged by the Hess Depth of Knowledge wheel. Units and tasks are reviewed with teachers to ensure activities align to curricula expectations to ensure that students are engaged in strategic and extended thinking when completing assignments.
- Frequent classroom observations and feedback from classroom visits hold staff accountable for implementing research-based, teacher practices. Teachers articulated they receive timely and accurate feedback on teaching. Observation reports demonstrated feedback to teachers in the area of questioning, student engagement and use of assessment in instruction. Teachers spoke to the school's professional development plan and its focus on ongoing checks for understanding. The school uses a lesson-planning template to ensure that teachers use multiple strategies to check for understanding. These plans are reviewed and critiqued in collaborative teacher teams.
- Parents and students understand the school's expectation that students will attend a four-year college after graduating. The school offers full time college advising, college tours, college readiness, and college admissions workshops for parents, through its partnerships with Urban Arts and Creative Connections. Parents and students have the opportunity to attend monthly awards ceremonies, celebrating individual progress and achievement. After school tutoring is offered to prepare students for the SAT and regents examinations.
- Parents are grateful for receiving ongoing feedback from teachers through the school's on-line grade reporting system, Schedula. Routine communication from the school help parents understand the specific needs of their children and what is needed to improve academically.