



Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Cascades

High School M650

**198 Forsyth Street
Manhattan
NY 10002**

Principal: Paul Rotondo

**Date of review: December 18, 2014
Reviewer: Eva Ostrum**

The School Context

Cascades is a high school with 222 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 45% Black, 48.2% Hispanic, 5% White, and 1.4% Asian students. The student body includes 1.8% English language learners and 8.6% special education students. Boys account for 41.4% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58.6%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 72.3%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Parents and students attest to a strong culture of high expectations, directed towards college and career, and coupled with highly personalized supports.

Impact

A system of reciprocal communication with families keeps parents informed of their child's progress. Guidance and advisement supports engage students in planning for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- More than half the parents present had already attended a college planning meeting with the school guidance counselor. All parents described the school's ongoing efforts to build a relationship with them around their child's progress, through email, phone calls, texting, and maintaining an open door policy at the school. Parent comments included: "I love how they work with my daughter. She is not the same person," "the staff attends to student needs," "the school makes students feel like a priority," "I always get an immediate response to a question or concern," "the principal is understanding and cooperative," "the parent coordinator is available any time."
- Students spoke in detail and at length about the culture of high expectations coupled with personalized supports that the school has created. All students understood the financial and opportunity cost of remedial classes and how to avoid them. Several students spoke of wanting to retake Regents exams that they had already passed at another school but on which they felt confident that they could improve now that they are at Cascades. Student comments included, "Teachers keep you on track," "I'm improving my grades," "the assistant principal calls me when I don't come," "they don't let you slack off," "this is the most supportive school I've ever seen," "I've grown a lot since I've been here."
- Students receive ongoing feedback and support around applying to and attending college. For example, students cited college trips on which CAMBA, the school's Learn-to-Work (LTW) partner takes them. CAMBA staff members and the school guidance counselor confirm that the discussion about college begins at intake, when students work with the counselor to review their transcripts to date and create a graduation plan that will lead them to college. The conversation continues as students create their online profiles on CollegeBoard.org and use that resource to research college options and plan for higher education. Students also have the opportunity to earn college credit and/or take classes to prepare them for college rigor through the school's College Now program.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching practice across classrooms demonstrates inconsistent alignment to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and to the instructional shifts. Student participation in classroom discussions varies across classrooms.

Impact

Due to the lack of coherence in teaching practices across classrooms, student work products and discussion reflect uneven levels of participation and student progress is hindered.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher use of questioning and discussion techniques varied across classrooms. For example, in a math class observed, the teacher circulated around the room to check for understanding while students were actively engaged in their classwork. However, in a social studies class observed, the teacher represented one of the sides of the class debate, and there was limited student participation in the discussion.
- Across classrooms, students inconsistently integrated textual evidence into their discussion and/or work products. For example, in an English language arts classroom, the teacher led students through a series of activities that supported them in gathering textual evidence for a Socratic seminar. However, students in a Global Literacy class were not observed consistently using textual evidence to defend their opinions on a world conflict.
- The structure of class discussions provided students with inconsistent opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer discussion. For example, in a social studies class observed, students had the opportunity to work in groups to develop a point of view on a historical development. However, in a science class observed, students were observed reading a weather chart and searching on the chart to identify temperature, air pressure, and other weather indicators. In this class, there was minimal peer-to-peer conversation observed.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Curricula and academic tasks across the school are inconsistently aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Lesson plans do not always provide access for of the diverse learners in the school.

Impact

Inconsistent alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards limits rigor, and a lack of coherence regarding planning for differentiation hinders access to the curricula for some learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, lesson plans reflected inconsistency in providing for rigorous and appropriately challenging instruction. For example, in a math class observed, student notebooks provided evidence of ongoing cognitive engagement and challenge throughout the period. However, in a science class, the teacher walked students through conducting a litmus test with an acid and a base, and with student engagement in this class limited to observation rather than active participation.
- Although the vast majority of lesson plans contained a section titled *differentiation*, this section of the lesson plan did not consistently provide specific information as to how supports were designed to meet individual students' needs. For example, although two lesson plans included provisions for student grouping (heterogeneous grouping in one, and student pairing in another), another lesson plan did not include planning for differentiation.
- Curricular materials reflected inconsistent alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, in a global literacy class, students had access to a wide range of authentic non-fiction texts as a resource in the task of gathering evidence for an argumentative essay. However, in another social studies class, all students were provided with the same modified version of a primary source document that the teacher had edited.

Findings

The school uses a robust system of common assessments that it continues to refine to provide baseline, formative, and summative feedback for both teachers and students.

Impact

The school uses data to inform its instructional focus and curricular and instructional revisions, leading to effective use of actionable feedback regarding student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use rubrics to share actionable feedback with students. For example, in a Global Literacy class, students had received a rubric that guided them as they worked on a major project, and that the teacher was going to use at the project's conclusion to assess student work.. Teachers used their team meetings to collaboratively examine rubrics that they had created so that they could improve them and share them across classrooms.
- The school currently has a robust baseline assessment system in place at intake. Students take EdPerformance assessments in reading and math. The school is currently expanding the baseline to include a writing assessment, which it now gives to all new students at intake, and which it is administering to current students who entered the school prior to this assessment being added to the intake process. The writing assessment corresponds to the school's instructional focus on argumentative literacy and reflects the school's commitment to develop its own practice.
- The school is currently introducing mid-year and end-of-year assessments to provide teachers and students with formative and summative data. Baseline assessments show that students need to develop their argumentative writing skills and their ability to analyze what they are reading. The school is expanding its battery of common assessments to provide ongoing data on student growth in these two areas and in mathematics.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All teachers engage in inquiry-based, structured professional development collaborations through which they have worked collaboratively to refine and revise curricula and academic tasks aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards aligned to their instructional focus on writing. Teachers participate in defining the academic foci of the school through the numerous teacher leadership opportunities available to them.

Impact

School-wide professional collaborations strengthen teacher instructional capacity, build instructional coherence, and support improved student performance. A distributive leadership structure engages teachers in key decision-making.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly in academic subject area groups to engage in inquiry that leads to ongoing refinement and revision of curricula and academic tasks. For example, in a team meeting observed, teachers used a consultancy protocol to analyze a task that a teacher on the team had created. Based on the discussion, teachers agreed to modify a graphic organizer that their students use as part of the writing process. A second teacher in the group spoke of modifications the team made to a separate graphic organizer earlier in the year.
- Distributed leadership structures are embedded at the school, as evidenced by whole staff participation in leadership meetings that address decisions on budget, staffing, student support, and programming. Teachers participate in defining the school's instructional foci each year. They also conduct professional development for their colleagues.
- The principal constantly seeks out new opportunities to develop distributed leadership capacity across the school. The school has participated for several years now in the Teacher Leadership Program (TLP), a program sponsored by the Office of Leadership (OOL) that provides training in facilitative leadership to school teams that include teachers and administrators. Several teachers noted that the principal had encouraged them to seek their administrative license so that they could grow professionally and take on increased responsibility at the school.