



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

High School of Applied Communication

High School Q267

**30-20 Thomson Avenue
Queens, NY 11101**

Principal: Daniel Korb

**Date of review: April 22, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Rajeev Bector**

The School Context

The High School of Applied Communication is a high school with 421 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 12% Black, 58% Hispanic, 13% White, 16% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87.9%.

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	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Well Developed
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

School leaders communicate high expectations to the entire staff and establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

The school creates a high degree of mutual accountability for staff. Supports for students ensure that all students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff is provided with a staff handbook that includes the promotion policy, grading policy, graduation requirements, information on teacher and student sourcebooks, curricula, work folders, and professional time responsibilities. School leaders provide professional development on the Common Core instructional shifts, the Danielson Framework for Teaching, Measures of Student Learning, the school's instructional focus, and Common Core-aligned curricula. The professional development calendar includes weekly and bi-monthly professional development sessions for teachers with a focus on the school-wide instructional goal of raising academic rigor. The school's professional development committee meets regularly to develop long- and short-term plans, assess the effectiveness of professional development sessions and inquiry work, determine next steps, and participate in the planning and facilitation of future sessions. For example, the committee determined that teachers needed to teach students to use literacy strategies to support the close reading of text in order to meet the school's goal of rigorous instruction. A teacher with expertise in this area facilitated a series of sessions on the use of literacy strategies in the classroom. As a result, teachers across disciplines began integrating literacy strategies in their classrooms.
- Teachers assume responsibility for strengthening colleagues' capacity through cycles of inter-visitation, and through a detailed analysis of student work, leading to a culture of mutual accountability. Teachers, with the support of administration, conduct peer observations, take low-inference notes, and focus on components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching when visiting their colleagues' classrooms, including, questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, and using assessment in instruction. Teachers provide written feedback to their peers, detailing the evidence of strengths in teacher practice, as well as next steps and goals for the host teacher.
- Teacher teams and staff communicate a unified set of high expectations for all students, and provide clear, focused and effective feedback to students in all subject areas, including physical education and art. Teachers provide assignments and set expectations using the school's online portal, Engrade. In collaboration with PENCIL, an organization that links businesses with local high schools, students in grade 12 participate in a year-long project with community partner National Cash Register (NCR). Students adopt public companies such as Starbucks, Google, Home Depot and Apple and present to a panel of NCR executives about why NCR should invest in their company. Through this process, students receive meaningful feedback from teachers and industry professionals and assume responsibility for being prepared for the next level.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Pedagogy is aligned to the school's core beliefs about student learning and to the curricula, and is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula, and student work products reflect high levels of student thinking.

Impact

The alignment of pedagogy to curricula enables students to be engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. While teachers create the conditions for high levels of student thinking through scaffolds and supports, students do not always take ownership of their own learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Pedagogy is aligned to the curricula and informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Across most classrooms, teachers engaged students in learning and grouped them appropriately. In a grade 11 Spanish class, students sat in groups of four and created an outline for a children's book. Each group had a native Spanish speaker to support other group members who were learning the language. In this class, students used creative processes to generate an original story, with graphic organizers and dictionaries as scaffolds. In an Economics class, students researched different companies and crafted arguments for investors to persuade them to invest in their adopted company. In both classes, students challenged each other, built upon their peers' responses, and could explain in detail what they were working on and why it was important to engage in this work.
- Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula and seek to engage all learners in appropriately challenging tasks. In a grade 10 Geometry class, students worked together to design a garden by creating their own designs. Groups worked at different paces based on skill level, and English language learners were provided with formula cards and definitions of domain-specific words to support content and language acquisition. In a science laboratory class, students conducted a range of experiments based on interest and readiness, and were able to explain the procedures to one another.
- While student work products reflected high levels of student thinking, ample student-to-student dialogue and evidence-based accountable talk was not seen across all classrooms. In some classrooms, teachers did not ask high quality questions or encourage students to arrive at new understandings of complex material. While students were on task and expended effort to meet academic expectations, they did not always have an opportunity to formulate their own questions, initiate topics or make unsolicited contributions. In two English language arts classes, for instance, teacher-centered instruction hindered students from engaging in a genuine discussion with their peers, and to reflect upon their learning and consolidate their understanding.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teachers use assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the curricula. Teachers' assessment practices create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, and consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Curricula-aligned assessments and rubrics enable teachers to make ongoing instructional adjustments and provide actionable feedback to students. As a result, teachers and students are clear on students' next steps, and all students demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, including physical education and art, the use of rubrics or checklists was seen. Students were given clear assessment criteria and received meaningful feedback regarding their achievement from their peers and teachers. Students and teachers used a variety of rubrics that include presentation, classwork, classroom environment, project, literary analysis and accountable-talk rubrics to constantly monitor student progress toward goals. In addition, a variety of formative assessments were explicitly detailed in curricula across grades and subjects.
- The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals, and adjusts curricula and instruction so that all students demonstrate increased mastery. For example, teachers administered and analyzed the social studies predictive assessment and determined that students were struggling with the analysis of images and political cartoons. To support students with these skills, they modified the learning objectives in the next unit to provide students with more practice with the analysis of political cartoons in their Document Based Question essays. Similarly, in a grade 9 English language arts class, data revealed that students who had previously struggled improved in their ability to apply literacy strategies to text, such as making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections, making predictions, and finding the main idea. After conducting further data analysis, the teacher incorporated lessons to target specific skills, such as how to draw inferences. He also adapted the rubric to make it easier for students to monitor their own progress.
- Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment. An examination of planning documents and observation data from class visits indicates that several types of assessment techniques are utilized, including turn and talk, exit cards, teacher data collection during small group work, peer assessments through questioning, choral response, one-to-one conferencing, and the use of observation and anecdotal records on iPads. Teachers encourage students to articulate the criteria for assessment by modeling essays, allowing students to develop the rubric criteria, and by asking students to paraphrase rubrics and expectations in their own words. As a result, students are cognizant of their next learning steps and work to achieve their goals.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core and content standards, and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

By aligning curricula to standards and refining curricula based on student outcomes, the school promotes college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. Curricula reference cross-disciplinary learning strategy goals, metacognitive strategies, literacy strategies, and strategies for practicing and applying new knowledge. Curricula also provide scaffolding for different learners, a variety of instructional materials and resources, including videos, PowerPoint presentations, cloud-based storage services, Internet resources, and both formative and summative assessments to gauge the extent of student learning.
- Curricula and planning documents make explicit connections to the Common Core standards, and reference Common Core aligned tasks from Engage NY. Curricula emphasize opportunities for students to build knowledge from text, analyze multiple documents and sources, and investigate problems and events through multiple perspectives. For instance, in Global History and Geography unit plans, students are expected to investigate the crusades from multiple perspectives to determine historical consequences, and in all math classes they are expected to annotate text using literacy strategies.
- Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data. Teachers update curriculum maps five times per school year based on results of student learning outcomes. Teachers use results of item analyses to inform grouping, pairing students who struggle with those who answered the question correctly. Additionally, after analyzing the results of assessments, teachers determined that students had difficulty understanding academic vocabulary. As a result, they modified the curricula and academic tasks to place more of an emphasis on building academic vocabulary.

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

Teacher teams systematically analyze teacher work, assessment data, and student work. There is effective teacher leadership, and teachers play an integral role in key decisions.

Impact

The deliberate and structured work of teacher teams has strengthened teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. Well-defined team structures enable teachers to positively impact student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Following a collaborative analysis of student data, teachers submitted individualized goals for the 2014-2015 school year, most of which reflected a desire to increase student engagement and rigor. Consequently, the school’s instructional focus of increasing rigor in all subject areas was developed collaboratively based on teacher input and student data. This instructional focus was further broken down into sub-goals based on feedback collected during school-wide professional development, as well as by input from the professional development committee.
- Teacher teams collect exit cards systematically to conduct data analysis. They then provide a data-based rationale that informs their decisions to adjust teacher practice and create strategic goals for groups of students, such as re-teaching concepts to the whole class or to groups of students, thus resulting in mastery of goals for those students. For instance, math teachers discovered that some students had difficulty understanding the concept of the greatest common factor. Teachers then focused on this skill with those students until the students demonstrated mastery.
- Distributed leadership structures are deeply-rooted, and serve as a conduit for teacher input in strategic decisions that affect student achievement. Teachers played an integral role in restructuring the school program by drafting an initial proposal, which was collaboratively revised by a team of teachers and administrators, resulting in a schedule that allowed for professional development, parent outreach, and weekly inquiry meetings, thus impacting student performance across the school.