



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Epic High School**

**27Q314**

**121-10 Rockaway Boulevard  
Queens  
NY 11420**

**Principal: Darius Mensah**

**Date of review: February 25, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Miatheresa Pate**

## The School Context

Epic is a high school with 89 students in grade 9. The school population comprises 34% Black, 26% Hispanic, 7% White, and 21% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 is not applicable.

## 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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

School leaders are in the process of embedding high expectations in all aspects of school culture, focusing on college and career readiness, in alignment with the citywide expectations and the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

### Impact

Staff, students, and families are aware of the expectations of the school and are developing the structures that support students in achieving these high expectations, thus ensuring a clear outlet leading to increased achievement and college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal has several structures in place to communicate expectations such as principal memos, one to one teacher meetings, staff huddles, professional development sessions and an instructional competency framework. The principal further revealed that teachers using the instructional competency framework are expected to implement a competency-based model where teachers assess student's acquisition of skills. This expectation resulted in teachers and administration creating a competency framework that identified 19 competencies and 66 attainments that students are assessed on. Furthermore, the review of the 66 attainments evidenced a connection to Common Core, Danielson Framework as well as Next Generation science standards and CASEL social-emotional standards. For instance, one of the competencies expect teachers to use various strategies which support students in accessing information from charts, graphs, and diagrams. The review of the "Staff Huddle" agendas shows that professional development is ongoing around this expectation.
- The dialogue with parents revealed that the administration sends notices home for each term and teachers make phone calls home routinely to update on missing homework and classwork. Additionally, the school provides Chromebooks for student and parent access to technology which provide update daily along with one to one discussions during the parent teacher conferences. Parents can also request to meet with teachers in team to discuss how to meet the school's student expectations
- The principal revealed that school is in process of developing student and staff handbooks. The school is pursuing a partnership with York College to bring college students onto the college for mentoring and tutoring. Students are also being prepped to taking advanced placement and college level classes in upper grades.
- The school has a CORE advisory program that the principal and students affirm helps them to various colleges and careers. Students revealed that they write resumes and discuss various careers. The principal revealed future goals include creating career exposure through job shadowing, mentoring, business plan development and internships.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide entry points and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Impact

Inconsistent entry points into the curricula with challenging tasks limit the engagement of all students in high levels of thinking and participation that culminate in meaningful work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- During the observation of an English classroom, students were tasked with drafting a clear and coherent written piece that cites textual evidence. To achieve this task the teacher provided student with translated text, Chromebook for writing and spell checking, key questions to ask of their peers in small groups during their pair-share, and graphic organizers. However, these types of strategies were inconsistent across classrooms.
- While dialogue with students indicated a willingness to participate, the dialogue also revealed that when questioned about how challenging the tasks are across content areas, multiple students noted “the work/task are about medium level of difficulty”. In support of this notion, a US history class began with a teacher-led discussion of current events. However, there was no introduction and no supports for thinking and participating were provided. As a result, not all students were engaged in the activity and challenged to demonstrate their thinking.
- Classrooms observed reflect inconsistent levels of student thinking and participation. During a science lesson, the teacher randomly organized some students into groups, while others were seated alone. The teacher during this same lesson asked students “Why did DNA copy itself?” Student responded “because it replicated itself...” another student stated “it made a replication...” The students did not answer the question they only restated the question as an answer. During this same lesson the teacher modeled the DNA replication process via the SMARTboard. This visual demonstration of an entry point was not observed across classrooms.
- The principal indicated that students are encouraged and allowed to engage in dialogue, technology, and provided an opportunity to write out their thinking as instructional strategies. These strategies were implemented inconsistently across classrooms. Teaching practices inconsistently leverage strategies such as questioning and discussions that prompt higher order thinking. The strategic use of scaffolding techniques was also inconsistent across classrooms, limiting multiple entry points to lessons and tasks for all learners including English language learners and students with disabilities.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Higher order skills are inconsistently emphasized for all learners across grades and content areas. School leaders and faculty are in the process of deepening the implementation, refinement and planning of curricular units and academic tasks.

### Impact

Curricula and tasks provide limited opportunities to engage students in all subgroups in rigorous tasks that emphasize critical thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school is in the beginning stages of implementation and planning of curricular units and academic tasks. For example, the school has recently partnered with the NYC Writing Project with Lehman College and has a coach who assisting in the process of adopting various strategies. Furthermore, teachers have engaged via this partnership in professional development, day-long institutes, and teacher study groups around the Common Core Learning Standards.
- Lesson plans provided as evidence for review in all content areas did not consistently emphasize higher order thinking. For example, a science lesson plan required students to identify a situation when the human body carries out replication and then engage in a mitosis activity. However, a math lesson plan required students to make math flashcards with content vocabulary, definitions, and math operation symbols. The aim of this lesson was “how do we create and use study cards in math”.
- Curricular documents reviewed reflect an inconsistent emphasis on higher order skills in learning tasks for all learners across grades and content areas. For example, English lesson plan revealed the integration of Common Core Standard W.4 which required students to produce a clear and coherent writing piece. The lesson noted how ELLs and students with disabilities would respond to the teacher generated prompt. However, in the review of math lesson plan on equations and expressions, there were inconsistent embedding of scaffolds that create opportunities for diverse students to engage in rigorous tasks that emphasize critical thinking

**Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of rubrics, ongoing checks for understanding, student self-assessments, and limited feedback.

**Impact**

As a result of inconsistent assessment practices and inadequate checks for understanding, actionable feedback to teachers and students regarding performance is limited.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers across classrooms are in the process of honing their skill around questioning and discussion as a tool for checking for understanding. For instance, the professional development calendars outlines ongoing training around these types of instructional assessments and teachers during the team meetings discussed students asking and answering questions as a next step for the students. For instance, during a living environment class students were tasked with explaining how cells divide to form genetically identical cells. During the lesson the teacher checked for understanding of topic by asking students to identify a situation when the human body carries out replication and reproduction. Students struggled with explaining replication stating "replication is when the cell has replication". Students also were challenged by identifying the difference between replication and reproduction. The teacher noted that students did not answer the question correct nor were have able to determine the difference between the two. The teacher responded by using a choral response techniques and providing examples. The teacher also provided visual aids via a power point slides.
- The review of lesson plans revealed that students complete exit slips that allow teachers to assess student understanding of key concepts. The principal shared that students use school-wide attainments as a self-assessment guide. However, other forms of student self-assessment were not observed across classrooms.
- The review of student work products revealed inconsistent and limited feedbacks on student work across classrooms. For instance, teacher feedback for an English language arts task was largely grammatical based "underline title, intro is one long sentence and good conclusion..." but some student work did have rubrics attached which provided supports to students around next steps. However, other student work products posted in classrooms revealed limited feedback such "great job!" and check plus marks. Additionally, feedback on bulletin boards in content areas across the school was limited and did not provide next steps.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### **Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations building their capacity in decisions relating to curriculum development, the integration of the Common Core Learning Standards, and analyzing student work.

### **Impact**

Emerging inquiry-based teacher collaborations have begun to align to school goals and to promote distributive leadership, resulting in an increased instructional capacity and teacher voice in key decision-making.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The principal revealed that because EPIC is a new small school with only six teachers distributive leadership is a foundational attribute of the school over the past five months. For instance, each teacher has a leadership role, such as learning manager point, student clubs point, Special Education Coordinator, learning environment point, student recognition point, and the UFT leadership support liaison. Furthermore, teachers revealed that they have voice and make decisions around how they collect data, instructional materials they select about curricula, and make school-wide decisions.
- The dialogue with teachers, administration, and the observation of a teacher team revealed that teacher teams have begun the process of adopted the Tuning Protocol and the Consultancy protocols as a means to gather data and analyze gaps in student learning. It was shared that during “Epic Staff Huddles” teachers are engaging in professional development specifically focused on both protocol. During this process, teachers were identified as presenters and in working groups. The presenter surfaced guiding questions while one group asked clarifying questions of the presenter(s) and the other group captured what they hear, didn’t hear, assumptions that appear to act as the reason, how they can address the dilemma surfaced, and what has been done in the past to address a similar situation.
- Dialogue with the administration and teachers revealed that teachers make curriculum decisions and determines the best resources that support school goals. For instance, teachers decided to adopt the Online Educate K-12, Jupiter online gradebook, and the integration of a lesson /unit presentation which allows for a structured format for colleagues to provide feedback to one another on the content of lesson plans and curriculum.