



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**Rockaway Park High School for
Environmental Sustainability**

High School Q324

**100-00 Beach Channel Drive
Queens
NY 11694**

Principal: Jennifer Connolly

**Date of review: April 29, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Renee Peart-Zachary**

The School Context

Rockaway Park High School for Environmental Sustainability is a high school with 361 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 45% Black, 32% Hispanic, 15% White, 1% American Indian, 1% Native Hawaiian, 3% Asian, and 3% other students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 78.0%.

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	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate to faculty high expectations that align to Danielson Framework. School leaders effectively communicate high expectations to families that are connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Ongoing communication of high expectations results in successful partnerships with families and a school culture of mutual accountability.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides parents with workshops on topics such as high school graduation requirements, college financial aid, summer youth employment, and understanding the Common Core Learning Standards. Parents have been invited to attend college and career events such as National Hispanic College Fair, Big Apple College Fair, State University of New York(SUNY)/City University of New York(CUNY) College Fairs, and the United States Army presentation. Furthermore, collaboratively the parent association and the teachers have utilized New York City Department of Education parent engagement resources to present workshops to the school community on the topics of understanding the instructional shifts and making connections to literacy.
- School leaders communicate high expectations to the staff through the summer curriculum institute, where teachers plan, create, and revise curricula. Additionally, school leaders share instructional expectations through informal and formal observations, daily conversations, and professional development on topics such as inquiry teams, curricula unit planning, and the instructional focus of argumentative writing.
- School leaders hold teachers accountable for school-wide instructional expectations through the lesson plan feedback form and the Learning Voyage template, which provide feedback on lesson plans and on units of study respectively.
- The school has a collaborative culture where teachers regularly visit their colleagues' classrooms and provide feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. During intervisitations they use a protocol and an instructional feedback template that includes the following statements: take-away areas of improvement for the observer, possible suggestions for improvement of the observed teachers, and evidence of the integration of the instructional focus. Feedback is given to the teachers through meetings with their peers and administrators, discussions at team meetings, and in writing.
- Teachers use a lesson plan/peer review template to provide their colleagues with feedback on their lesson plans. A review of this form revealed that teachers receive feedback from their peers aligned to the components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teachers use assessments and rubrics and have grading policies that are aligned to the school's curricula. Across classrooms, teachers' lessons include the use of ongoing checks for understanding and students have opportunities to self-assess their work products.

Impact

The teachers' assessment practices are evolving so that all learners, including low-, mid-, and high-level achievers are receiving actionable and meaningful feedback and teachers are consistently making effective adjustments to meet the needs of all scholars.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms visited, teachers' strategies as checks for understanding included teacher observation, questions, cold-call technique, and students' self-assessing their work using checklists or student-created rubrics. During lessons observed, student awareness of their next immediate steps varied across classroom visits. For example, in a grade 9 English class, students created and answered high-level questions on the topic of access to guns and the power of the media. Students used the Asking Good Questions rubric to self-assess questions created by their peers. The teachers circulated the classroom and observed some students grappling with creating questions and who were not fully aware of their immediate next learning steps. In classes of Marketing and Earth Science, students worked in groups to complete the task and the teachers took low-inference data notes to record students' struggles and successes. Students were given immediate feedback as it guided them in their next learning steps.
- Some student work products displayed on hallway and classroom bulletin boards had actionable and meaningful feedback. For example, in a grade 12 English course, students received detailed meaningful feedback on their argumentative writing essays. One teacher's feedback said, "Your second draft has certainly improved. You cleared up many of the grammar errors that I pointed out to you earlier. For your third draft, please work on other writing conventions that I addressed. Next steps, please take a look at your word choice and level of vocabulary. I know you know some really nice words from your SAT Exam. Try to use them in your essay." However, this type of meaningful feedback was not evident across all students' work products reviewed.
- In the student interview, students reported that they have input in creating rubrics, they are aware of the department grading policies, and they receive feedback on their work. Across classrooms visited, although there was some meaningful and actionable feedback aligned to a rubric, at times it was not sufficiently meaningful. For example, in an English class, student work displayed on bulletin boards had teacher feedback that said, "You had some excellent points and you used research excessively without contradicting your counterclaim, please refer to my comments on the attached rubric to get a better understanding of your next steps." However, in another English class, student work displayed on the bulletin board had teacher feedback that said, "You really did a fantastic job on this assignment. You explained yourself in a very articulated way. Keep up the good work." Although feedback included the next step of "keep up the good work", the teacher's response missed providing a meaningful explanation of how to maintain the good work. School leaders are in the process of working with teachers around giving meaningful feedback.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills presented across grades and content areas are embedded in a coherent way to push learners to think deeply about concepts.

Impact

School leaders' and teachers' curricular decisions have led to coherency across grades and subject areas, lessons that promote college and career readiness, and all students including English language learners(ELLs) and students with disabilities, having opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus of argumentative writing using complex text is a deeply rooted process as staff develop rigorous tasks across content areas. Coherent tasks push learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities to demonstrate their thinking. For example, for a Living Environment task, students were asked to write an argumentative essay on how to depict the working cells, and for an Algebra task, students were asked to complete a project on the rate of change of the slope of the pyramid. In a Global Studies task, students were asked to write a document-based essay on Egyptian religion by citing evidence to support their claim and for Earth Science, students were asked to write an argumentative essay on whether we should be sending humans to Mars because it is a planet that we could potentially colonize.
- Across grades and departments, teachers use unit of study and lesson plan templates to create lessons that promote the instructional shift of argumentative writing. These teacher created templates allow lessons to be planned in a coherent way. A review of unit plans revealed argumentative writing tasks are incorporated into all subject areas including health, art, and music. Furthermore, across content areas, unit plans strategically included the instructional shifts of academic vocabulary, staircase of complexity, and knowledge in the disciplines.
- School leaders and teachers meet over the summer for their curriculum institute to create curricula that promote college and career readiness skills. Teachers use resources such as Engage NY, New York City Scope and Sequence, and Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge. Additionally, teachers created the Learning Voyage interdisciplinary unit plan, which they use to develop lessons. A review of lesson plans evidenced college readiness skills such as annotating text, note-taking, argumentative writing to support a claim and counterclaim, reading complex text, and opportunities for students to have rigorous conversations that were dependent on a common complex text.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and opportunities for students to reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Coherent teaching practices result in all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, engaging in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrating critical-thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms visited, increase supports for diverse learners included the use of intentional heterogeneous grouping, use of visual aids and graphic organizers, student choice of roles in a group, leveled text, chunking text, jigsaw, and differentiated worksheets. For example, in a grade 9 Earth Science class, students worked in six different investigation teams to identify factors that affect climate on Earth. Students had a choice of the roles in the groups and some students were given additional materials to complete the task. In a grade 10, Geometry Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) class, students worked in either low, medium, or high-leveled groups on quadrilateral properties. Tasks were differentiated by the group. Some students were given graphic organizers to complete the task.
- Across classrooms visited, students engaged in high-level discussions with their peers. For example, in a grade 11, United States History class, students created questions about Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Students shared their questions with each other. One student said, "Let me explain my evidence so you understand why my question is a level 6 question." In a grade 12, English class, students were observed engaging in an argumentative speaking task. Students debated their claims on wearing uniforms. Students engaged in a fishbowl activity, a discussion that allows participants to listen actively to the experiences and perspectives of their peers while taking notes. The teacher served as facilitator as she asked low-, mid- and high-level questions to promote student-to-student discussions.
- Across classrooms visited, teachers provided students with multiply entry points into the lesson. For example, in a grade 9, Global History class, students grouped heterogeneously worked in five different stations to analyze primary and secondary sources to answer the questions: Should we celebrate Christopher Columbus Day? Is Columbus a hero or a villain? At each station, the teacher included materials and resources to provide multiple entry points to all learners. The teacher included a timer, pictures, questions of different ranges, student created-rubrics, and verbal and written prompts at each station.

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

Professional collaborations allow teams of teachers to share content knowledge and instructional strategies that are aligned to the school’s instructional focus of increasing argumentative writing. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work.

Impact

Teacher teaming results in strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers, improving pedagogy, and increasing student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- During an observed English language arts teacher team meeting, teachers used a Collaborative Assessment Conference protocol to examine students’ argumentative writing essays. Teachers identified how students need more support with writing a topic sentence and transition words. Teachers discussed next steps for forthcoming lessons. In addition, teachers discussed how they would continue the work of training students how to use primary and secondary sources as well as re-teach learners how to use transition words in their essays.
- School leaders reported that teachers are always reviewing student work and data in team meetings. A review of department- and grade-level teacher team agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets revealed that the practice of analyzing student work and data occurs every week at the school. School leaders and teachers reported that the work of the teacher team has improved student performance as evidenced by overall course passing rate that has increased in the school year 2014-2015 to 79.31% from the 2013-2014 school year passing rate of 76.88%. Furthermore, school leaders reported that because of the teacher teaming and opportunities for teachers to share best practices, there has been an increase in the Advance data. Ninety-eight percent of teachers have been rated as effective or highly effective in the areas of student engagement and questioning and discussion.
- During the teacher interview, teachers reported that because of the weekly collaborations with their team, pedagogical practices have improved in the Danielson components of questions and discussions and student engagement. One teacher said, “I have learned so much from my colleagues and now I ask more high-level questions.” A second teacher said, “We share best practices and learn from each other. Based on what I have learned, my classes have more student voice now.”
- The school has many ways teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations. The department facilitator team, department team, grade team, and inquiry team meet at least one to two times a week during common planning time. School leaders reported students were selected from the bottom third for the inquiry teams. During these inquiry meetings, teachers examine student argumentative essays and discuss ways to reteach skills that students grapple with as well as ways to enhance forthcoming lessons. A review of inquiry team agendas and minutes provided evidence of how teachers consistently engage in the inquiry process.