



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

August Martin High School

High School Q400

**156-10 Baisley Boulevard
Queens
NY 11434**

Principal: Gillian Smith

**Date of review: May 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael Alcott**

The School Context

August Martin is a high school with 640 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 77% Black, 12% Hispanic, 1% White, 7% Asian and 3% Multi-Racial students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 78.4%.

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	Developing
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	Developing
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
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Findings

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributive leadership practices are in place through the inquiry teams and the school's Vision Committee.

Impact

Teacher team work contributes to improved teacher practice, leading to student progress towards learning goals. Teacher voice in key decisions positively impacts student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade level inquiry teams in the ninth grade are engaged in "Writing is Thinking Strategic Inquiry" (WITsi), in which the teams meet twice weekly to review student writing for a targeted group of students. Short-term, specific mastery goals are set, gaps are identified, and curricular and pedagogical decisions are made to address the gaps. Student work is analyzed for both mastery of the targeted writing skill and understanding of the content. For example, the ninth grade team observed during the Quality Review, analyzed student writing in different content areas and came to consensus on whether each student mastered the writing skill of using conjunctions, while the content specialist weighed in on student mastery of the content of each sample of work. Based on this analysis, teachers make decisions on next steps, including the removal of certain writing scaffolds.
- Department and inquiry teacher teams look at student work, examine assessments aligned to Regents exams, and monitor data to identify gaps in student learning. In addition, teacher teams meet six times a year to develop common assessments that are linked to the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. As a result of the focus on closing achievement gaps identified via analysis of Regents pass rates, the percentage of students in the school passing Regents exams has increased in most content areas, and the percentage of students moving from a score of below 55 to the 55-64 range has increased on the majority of Regents exams.
- Teacher leaders who are members of the school's Vision Committee, collaboratively work with school leaders in the development of curricula, design and facilitation of professional learning sessions, and the creation of school policies. Teachers from the team expressed that school leaders allow for much autonomy in the creation or selection of curricula based on the needs and learning styles of their students. For example, teachers from the school's Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations (PLATO) program shared that they were given full reign to customize curricula to address gaps in student learning. Teachers who sit on the Vision Committee also agreed that teachers have a say in the professional development they receive and that decisions are collaboratively made within their departments, to ensure all teachers' needs are met. One teacher shared that decisions are not "top-down" and include all stake holders.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and do not consistently include opportunities for all students to engage in peer to peer discussions.

Impact

Student engagement in challenging tasks is limited and student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of higher-order thinking and participation in learning across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal articulated that teachers are expected to provide all students with opportunities to engage in productive struggles with cognitively engaging tasks. While some teachers' lessons reflected this practice, this was an inconsistent feature across classrooms visited. For example, in a science research class students were engaged in using data as evidence in determining types of volcanoes. Students were asked to explain how the evidence led to their determinations. The work was challenging and engaging for students. In contrast, students in a ninth grade English class were responding to the prompt "What is your understanding of a hero?" Students' responses were not based on any textual evidence and no other supporting evidence was explicitly required. Further, although students were given the choice of providing a written response or creating a drawing to answer the prompt, neither choice was rigorous.
- In a classroom visited during a Global 4 lesson, students worked in small groups with their peers to make meaning of content from the "Iron Curtain Speech". They engaged in sharing their ideas and findings and explained why they believed Winston Churchill's speech was necessary, by citing evidence from the text to support their claims. This high level of engagement of students in discussions with peers was not evident across the classrooms visited. In an eleventh grade United States History 2 lesson, students were seated in partnerships and assigned the task of discussing how the work of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois expanded higher education for African Americans. During the whole group share-out, the teacher dominated the discussion by having students respond directly to his questions, with limited opportunities for them to comment on responses from peers.
- In the majority of classes observed, students were engaged in whole class activities, with few examples of differentiation or individualized attention. For example, in a geometry class, although students were seated in groups, the instruction was whole class and all responses were student to teacher. With the exception of two classes, students were not engaged in group activities. Students in an English 3 classes were paired but not working on the task together. Further, in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) algebra class, many students finished early and sat passively waiting for next steps from the teacher, as there was no alternate task to engage them in deepening their understanding.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and building coherence across grades and departments. Curricula and academic tasks do not consistently reflect teacher use of student work and data to design rigorous tasks for all students.

Impact

All students do not yet have regular access to Common Core aligned academic tasks with data driven supports that reflect their diverse needs and consistently offer them opportunities to engage in higher order thinking across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- Although a majority of English and math teachers use Engage NY modules to drive their instruction, there is a small group of teachers who are working with the Common Core Learning Institute to develop and align their curriculum and lesson planning to the Common Core Learning Standards. The work is designed to help teachers align curriculum and tasks to relevant anchor standards, essential questions, and Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels. The science department has developed its own science research course curriculum with the support of a science coach. The course is designed to pull content from various sciences, using more inquiry and experimentation.
- School leaders have developed and shared explicit criteria for unit and lesson planning. For example, teachers are expected to use essential questions and plan tasks for students to engage in close reading, text annotation, and finding evidence to use in their writing. Units are expected to culminate in tasks driven by DOK level 4 questions, although that is not expected in every lesson. Further, teachers are expected to script questions with increasing complexity in lesson planning. In a review of unit and lesson plans, however, it was noted that these practices are not consistently evident. For example, while the lesson plan for Advanced Placement Statistics included scripted questions that progressed from lower level procedural questions to higher level conceptual questions, the lesson plan for U.S. History and Government included no pre-planned questions except for a low level DOK essential question.
- A lesson plan for a Spanish class showed use of data to incorporate peer support for struggling students by pairing students who had successfully completed a task with those who had not. However, there was little evidence of similar use of data in plans seen for an English, math and U.S. History and Government lesson. Further, while two general education math classes illustrated use of data for purposeful grouping of students, there was no evidence of further planning for all students to have full access to the lesson content and tasks.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing assessments to evaluate and provide actionable feedback about students' progress towards goals across grades and subject areas. Teachers' assessment practices do not consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Assessment practices do not consistently generate data that drives adjustments to curricula and instruction and makes students aware of their strengths and learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Although some teachers utilize assessments and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula to assess students' needs, feedback to students is not always actionable with clear direction on what students need to do to improve. For example in review of student work on bulletin boards, feedback to a student stated, "Just pay attention to minor details". In one student's work folder, feedback to the student stated, "Thanks", without any information on what was done well or what the student needed to work on. A review of student work in an Algebra class revealed a consistent lack of teacher feedback. Furthermore, during the student interview, some students confirmed that while they utilize rubrics across the major content areas, they do not always receive feedback from their teachers that allows them to know what they need to do in order to get to the next level.
- Across classrooms, teachers' use of ongoing assessment practices, including checks for understanding, was inconsistent. In a math class, the special education teacher asked students what the angles of a triangle add up to and then asked them "so how did you get the third angle?" to which one student replied correctly. The teacher told the student, "So do it" before walking away, never noting that the student had already done that part of the task and had an unrelated question. In the geometry class, the teacher remained in front of the room, going over the 'Do Now' problem even though only two students had begun solving the problem, while the remainder of the class was still copying from the board. In the same class, the teacher asked a student, "How did you get (3, 3)?" to which the student responded, "I guessed. On my paper it said $1 + 2$ so I said 3." The teacher responded, "It helps to pay attention." By contrast, in the Spanish class the teacher uncovered a misconception through effective questioning even though it appeared most students had the correct answer. The teacher immediately addressed the misconception by reviewing the item.
- Aside from the ninth grade academy team that assesses and tracks student writing on a consistent basis, the incorporation of assessment practices in units and lessons is inconsistent across and within departments. For example, while the curriculum map for a science research class identified multiple forms of assessment for each unit, the instructional plan for an algebra lesson and one for a Global History lesson about the "Cold War" contained no reference to assessment. In addition, a curriculum map for Living Environment only said, "Formative and Summative", in the section labeled "Assessment".

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is engaged in ongoing development of systems and structures for communicating to all staff and families, high expectations related to teaching and learning and college and career readiness for all students.

Impact

Effective communication of high expectations for teaching and learning across the school and consistent communication with families about college and career readiness initiatives and goals for all students are not yet fully evident across stakeholders.

Supporting Evidence

- Every morning a memo is distributed to all staff, informing them of updates on best instructional practices, parent outreach reminders and student news. The morning memo is delegated monthly to assistant principals and each week selected teachers are chosen to submit an article to promote communication across the school community. The principal also sends out a “Principal’s Weekly Newsletter” again sharing best practices, resources, and school updates with staff.
- The Principal provides feedback to assistant principals on their feedback to teachers to promote a system of accountability with common shared expectations for teacher growth. However, assistant principal feedback to teachers is not consistently aligned to the school’s instructional focus, expectations for professionalism, and instructional expectations linked to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, the majority of observation reports reviewed did not reference the school’s instructional focus. The school provides training through its weekly professional development for teachers, as outlined in its professional development plan. The plan is only loosely aligned to the expectations for instruction and implementation of the school-wide focus in the first part of the year. Teacher training became more focused around the school’s emphasis on writing in the second half of the year, with the incorporation of “Writing is Thinking for Strategic Inquiry” (WITsi) training for teachers into the weekly professional development plan since then.
- Parents are informed of the school’s high expectations and other pertinent information for student success, through the receipt of documents such as a school-wide grading policy, the School Comprehensive Educational Plan goals and course syllabi. In addition, information is listed on the school’s website which allows parents to access information translated into their native language. Parents can also access their children’s grade information and contact teachers using Pupil Path, an online data portal, at any time. However, according to some parents interviewed, communication with families regarding college and career readiness for students has not been consistent and has not resulted in a clear understanding of school initiatives for ensuring student progress towards college and career readiness goals. For example, the school made critical decisions regarding career education programs that were eliminated or have become non-functional, such as the Aviation program. Parents reported that they were aware that those decisions were based on a lack of resources but expressed concern that their voices were not heard and that the impact on students who were interested in these programs was not adequately addressed by the school.