



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Newtown**

**High School Q455**

**48-01 90 Street  
Queens  
NY 11373**

**Principal: John Ficalora**

**Date of review: April 24, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Joseph O'Brien**

## The School Context

Newtown is a high school with 2,074 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 9% Black, 60% Hispanic, 4% White, and 26% Asian students. The student body includes 32% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 85.0%.

## 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>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

School leaders consistently emphasize a culture of learning that communicates high expectations, provide training, and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with parents to support student progress.

### Impact

High expectations result in a culture of mutual accountability, collaboration, and buy-in on the part of teachers, leaders, and families, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to the developmental needs of all students. School leaders successively partner with families to support student independence, progress, and ownership of learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has created a professional learning committee consisting of administrators and teachers to design and lead professional learning opportunities each week. During collaborations, committee members review teacher survey data and discern next steps for staff in professional learning. Committee members note strengths and weaknesses of teachers as well as self-assess to determine degree of impact on classroom teaching and learning. Ongoing professional learning for teachers by teachers and school leaders in these areas and feedback via surveys occur at least once per week resulting in a culture of mutual accountability.
- The school provides families with monthly student goal sheets which detail progress in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Additionally, families receive school-wide curriculum calendars detailing upcoming units of study for each subject and grade. Parents shared that workshops with guest speakers are well attended. Workshop topics include, fostering effective communication skills, anti-bullying strategies, technology in the classroom, Skedula/Daedalus training, understanding the Common Core Learning Standards, and college and financial aid information support. Parent surveys are used to discern workshop success. Parent volunteers are also trained to assist in school activities including Curriculum Night, Freshman Orientation and Saturday Academy for Parents.
- School leaders set high expectations and a system of accountability for teachers during pre-and post-observation conferences and ongoing Danielson based professional learning opportunities. Professional learning on adapting curricula to meet the demands of the Common Core Learning Standards and Danielson Framework for teaching has been provided. Additionally, weekly emails from the principal note teacher and school progress, convey important reminders, and underline administrative initiatives. For example, in a March communiqué to staff, the administration presented a case study showcasing the importance of teacher checks for understanding along with skills and tips to use in the classroom.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas and the results are used to adjust curricula and instruction. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and use of student self-assessment.

### Impact

Although the school uses common assessments and student self-assessment to track progress and frequent checks for understanding to make strategic adjustments, in some classes all students do not get adequate feedback so they know next steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers consistently check for understanding by using a variety of assessment protocols including, "red, yellow, green" cards and/or thumbs up signals to indicate students' confidence, strategies for calling on non-volunteers, and use of exit tickets.
- Teachers revealed that teacher teams' focus on in-class department common assessment item analysis, teacher team created assessments, and Regents data to identify areas of strength and develop common strategies to address areas in need of growth. In addition, teams examine student work in order to create a more in-depth and cohesive action plans. As a result of this practice, teachers are equipped to design lesson to meet students' needs. For example, eleventh grade teachers analyzed the English language arts (ELA) Regents item analysis and noted that students struggled with multiple choice. Teachers created a detailed chart denoting problematic question including the wrong answers, which were most popular among students to identify student missteps. Teachers designed additional units focusing on multiple choice strategies including process of elimination, Joe Bloggs answers, and clues in context.
- Across classrooms teachers consistently utilize a clipboard system to record students' responses with individual student notations when checking for student understanding during lessons. In a tenth grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) social studies class, the teacher made on-the-spot modifications to the lesson based on students' responses cutting a portion of the mini lesson as she noted student comprehension of the main idea. During an English as a second language (ESL) algebra lesson, the teacher noticed that some students did not understand the directions for the group task. The teacher asked students to talk to their partners for further clarity and checked in again with students before they began their work. However, some teachers are still working on making effective adjustments during the lesson to meet all students' learning needs.
- Students self-assess and work was posted with student reflection statements such as, "Next time, I will remember my topic sentence." Additionally, teacher feedback including "You have many good ideas but they are not organized," and "You need to use an outline to organize your ideas and your essay," were seen. However, in some classrooms reviewed student work and posted assignments listed just grades and/or general comments such as "Excellent," or "Good Job." Limiting opportunities for students' strategic self-reflection, ownership of their learning, and understanding of clear next steps.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn and consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

### Impact

Teaching practices reflect the Danielson Framework for Teaching so that all learners including English language learners and students with disabilities have multiple entry points that support student engagement and participation in lessons.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders prioritize teaching practices that provide multiple entry points, supports and extensions to all students as well as instructional practices that promote high levels of student thinking and participation. For example in ninth grade United States History class, leveled readings and tiered tasks were provided to three unique groupings for students based on ability. In tenth grade English, students in one of three tiered groups answered unique higher-order questions about Snowball's journey in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.
- During the meeting with teachers, teachers shared that mutual trust between school leaders and the faculty promotes conversations about best practices in creating an inclusive classroom environment and has strengthened the school's beliefs that all students can learn when they are engaged and comfortable in taking risks.
- Across classrooms, teachers provided multiple entry points to engage students in challenging tasks. For example, teachers were observed using turn-and-talks and group talk, needs-based grouping, modeling of tasks, and graphic organizers.
- In classrooms visited, teachers facilitated learning opportunities through student discussions, engaging tasks, and guiding questions. For example, how do conflicts play a role in Orwell's *Animal Farm*? or "How did Streicher's work impact the way people felt about Jews? In those classes, all students were highly engaged in rich conversations on the subject.

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and intentionally integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

Purposeful curricula decisions are building coherence and promoting college and career readiness for all students. All students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, have access to curricula and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a blend of teacher-created resources and those found on Engage NY to align curricula to Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers utilize pedagogical tools such as Hess’s Cognitive Rigor Matrix, Webb’s Depth of Knowledge, and Blooms Taxonomy to develop instruction, design questions, and formulate assessments that connect with higher order thinking skills. Authentic, balanced informational and literary texts and passages are listed in ELA curriculum maps. In English, texts and tasks grow in difficulty along a continuum in which parallel texts become more complex, thus, providing a “staircase of complexity” .For example, English pacing guides and curriculum maps note specific, pre-chosen ESL texts which grow in complexity. For example, while general education students continue working with Shakespeare to prepare for the ELA Regents exam by studying Shakespearian sonnets, ESL students use Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle with related poetry readings to practice identifying controlling ideas.
- Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined for English language learners and students with disabilities using student work and data. Teacher teams noted that English language learners struggled with comprehension and use of idioms such as the idiom “raining cats and dogs.” Teachers redesigned units to allow for extension activities for English language learners to use and practice use of idioms in writing.
- ICT co-teachers collaboratively design curricula, instructional tasks, create multiple-entry points and forge assessments that meet the needs of students at their level, resulting in differentiated tasks. The school has developed a co-planning template to improve the co-planning process. ICT lesson plans in ELA and math included parallel teaching notes, unique roles, and specific higher order thinking questions to use with each student subgroup.
- Advanced students are given an additional unit portfolio assignment related to ELA Regents content which requires students to create a cover page and vocabulary list, participate in relevant group work, and write journal entries on their reflections and connections made to real world events.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promoted the achievement of the school's goals and the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams systematically analyze assessment data and student work to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Impact

Structured professional collaborations result in the building of school wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Teacher teamwork results in shared improvements in teacher practice and progress for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams create assessments, tasks, rubrics, protocols and curricular adaptations and extensions for all students including English language learners and students with disabilities. Teams share resources online via the Edmodo online platform. For example, teachers created an ESL assessment analysis worksheet to accurately assess ELL progress.
- Teams meet at least three times per week to engage in six to eight week inquiry cycles, adapt curricular resources including tasks and rubrics, and engage in student data analysis. For example, student item analyses data highlighted that students struggle with multiple choice. Teachers met to research new ways to teach multiple-choice strategies including how best to teach inference and process of elimination of obviously wrong answers.
- Eleventh grade teams noted that English language learners struggled with academic vocabulary. Teachers created vocabulary based activities including the front loading of vocabulary and teaching of vocabulary through anchor texts. Additionally, tenth grade history teams noted that students struggled with using infographics and political cartoons, so they revised curriculum to allow students to master pre-requisite skills including citation of textual evidence in featured articles prior to working with charts, cartoons, and graphs.
- Teams meet at least twice per week, and teacher leaders meet weekly with the administration, and monthly with the principal to support shared improvements in teacher practice and student goals. Teams are responsible for looking at data and student work using protocols and engaging in collaborative planning of lessons and curriculum. Team members also engage in providing each other with feedback. Additionally, ELA teams are responsible for grading Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) exams, and examining MOSL data (at the end of the second marking period) to inform their planning and preparation for their classes. Teams create and evaluate two major Common Core performance tasks each year (analyzed after each completion for revisions). Data from these assessments impact student flexible groupings and inform tiered projects.