



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Richmond Hill High School

High School Q475

**89-30 114th Street
Queens
NY 11418**

Principal: Neil Ganesh

**Date of review: May 19, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael Alcott**

The School Context

Richmond Hill High School is a high school with 2,131 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 13% Black, 48% Hispanic, 5% White, 30% Asian, 3% Native Hawaiian, 1% other students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 11% 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 83.0%.

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	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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Celebration	Proficient
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:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders, teacher teams, and other staff establish and consistently communicate high expectations to all students and families and provide ongoing feedback to help families track students' progress toward those expectations. Teachers and guidance counselors provide students with effective guidance and advisement to support their success in meeting those expectations.

Impact

Students understand the school-wide expectations for academic and personal behaviors that will help them prepare for the next level. Parents understand how their children are progressing towards expectations communicated to them by school staff.

Supporting Evidence

- During the student meeting, students were able to articulate how they receive information that helps them understand what courses are needed to prepare for the next level. The school uses PupilPath, an online grading system, and students carefully track their progress on it. One student said, "I know exactly how many credits I need to graduate because I can see it online." A second student said, "I like the fact that I can find out my graduation information quickly because it helps me understand what I need to do in my classes."
- The school's "Are You Green?" initiative has gained a lot of traction with students. The program tracks student attendance, discipline, and academic progress, color coding them in each of these areas as green, yellow, or red. Students are able to check their status through PupilPath or through any of the numerous and prevalent displays around the school. Students understand that the consequences of not being "green" are both immediate, in the form of the denial of certain privileges, and long term in the form of impacting promotion to the next level and graduation. It has also helped students make the connection between immediate behaviors, such as poor attendance, and long term consequences, such as grade promotion. One student, who had fallen behind in school, knew every Regents exam and credit he still needed, as well as how many detentions he had to make up.
- Parents have access to PupilPath data to track the progress of their child. Four of five parents interviewed reported that they check PupilPath multiple times per week. In addition, a majority of parents reported regular email contact with teachers and guidance counselors, and noted that they find staff, including the principal, to be highly responsive to inquiries about their children. The parents knew about the "Are You Green?" initiative and were able to speak to the "green" status of their individual children. During parent-teacher conferences, parents were introduced to their individual child's "Go Green" status and trained on how to read the key associated with the online grading system. The school also communicated and trained parents on other related initiatives at separate Parent Teacher Association meetings.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Assessment practices are loosely aligned with the school's curricula and feedback from assessments is inconsistent shared across classrooms.

Impact

Some teachers make adjustments to meet student learning needs and students have limited knowledge of their next steps to progress in mastering identified skills and content.

Supporting Evidence

- Some teachers offer opportunities for students to use rubrics to assess their work. For example, in a grade 9 English class, students used a rubric to assess their text-analysis response essays and students in a grade 10 English class used a rubric to guide and grade their responses to "White Angel," a short story. However, in a grade 10 English class, students were asked to describe Romeo's character in the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, without the opportunity to use a rubric to assess their work. Reviews of student work on bulletin boards and in students' folders also indicated few opportunities for student self-assessment.
- Although the school has models of effective feedback with clear next steps, a review of student work products on hallway and classroom bulletin boards, and shared by students, revealed that while some students received actionable feedback, other students received a rubric with a score or just a check for completion of the task. For example on a science task, the teacher feedback said, "Some critical information is missing. Next step, include more details and use other sources for your information." On a ninth grade English annotated reading task, the teacher feedback said, "If you identify words you don't know, and be sure to define them, it will help you understand the information better." On the other hand, on a Global Studies task, teacher feedback said, "Very well done, neat and organized" and on an English essay, teacher feedback said, "Add a new paragraph, your organization needs attention." A poem written by a ninth grade student had a grade of 90 with no rubric attached. When asked what made the grade a 90, the student was unable to articulate a reason.
- School leaders reported that teachers check for understanding using various methods such as entrance and exit slips, teacher observation and questions, turn and talks, and student share-outs. However, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently included checks for understanding. For example, in a grade 11 United States History class, the teacher asked students to answer a question on Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." As the teacher circulated the classroom, the check for understanding related to procedures of the task. The teacher said, "Make sure you copy the question." In an Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) math class, two students had the role of checking the work of their peers. However, the two students checked all student responses as correct, even though some were clearly incorrect. Neither of the teachers present in the class closely monitored student work. In contrast, the two teachers in an ICT geometry class grouped students and provided more purposeful support and monitoring of their work. The lesson concluded with an exit ticket aligned to the learning objective for the day.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders collaborate with all staff to build coherence and align curricula to Common Core Learning Standards. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

The curriculum is designed to allow all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, access to Common Core aligned tasks and to address gaps in student skills that inhibit students' understanding of content across grade levels and subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has taken a number of steps to align curriculum maps and unit planning to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. School leaders introduced an Understanding by Design aligned template for unit planning that includes essential questions, assessments, focus questions, learning tasks, and academic vocabulary. The unit template also includes adaptations for students with diverse learning needs, including lowest third, students with disabilities, highest third, and English language learners (ELLs). Units and individual lessons, especially in English language arts and social studies, are guided by higher order essential or focus questions that lend themselves to evidence-based claims and counterclaims. For example, a "Heroes and Dreamers" unit for tenth grade English asks "Can Anyone be a Hero?" A ninth grade English unit asks, "Do Our Differences Define Us?" A social studies unit on American Imperialism asks, "Was the U.S. destined to become an imperialist power?" and "Was the Spanish-American War justified?"
- The school has implemented a school-wide writing project to align its curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. The focus of the school-wide writing project is reading closely and researching in order to develop and communicate evidence-based claims and arguments about complex texts and topics. The writing project has been implemented in English, English as a second language, math, science and social studies, with the goal of promoting higher-level thinking skills in all students. The school uses the Tri-State rubric to assess the standards applicable to content specific curricula and the school-wide writing project facilitates vertical alignment of curricula. Students in grade 9 learn sentence writing strategies through "Writing is Thinking Strategic Inquiry" (WITSi). By grade 12, students are expected to complete essays or research projects at the culmination of most courses. These projects are driven by a higher-order thinking essential question that students are required to grapple with and respond to with appropriate textual evidence.
- Departments, teams and individual teachers use student work and data to make adjustments to unit plans and curriculum maps, for example, by including more content specific vocabulary for ELLS in an economics unit on creating a budget. The teacher also created an additional mini-project for ELLs to complete to improve their mastery of the content. Science teachers added a graphing lab to the Earth Science curriculum based on data showing students struggle with graphing. In addition, the school's unit plan template includes post-unit reflection to identify adjustments based on student learning. For example, the Living Environment unit plan included a post-implementation reflection recognizing the need for a pre-assessment of content knowledge and the incorporation of tier three vocabulary.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching practices are beginning to provide multiple entry points to learning tasks for all students. Student discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Opportunities for students to engage in peer to peer discussions and demonstrate higher order thinking are inconsistent across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- In a ninth grade ICT Global Studies class, students worked in purposeful heterogeneous groups to read a document-based text on imperialism. In groups, students discussed the content of the text. Selected students were provided with differentiated supports such as chunking the text and graphic organizers. However, in a grade 9 English class all students worked on the same Regents essay task with no opportunities for group work and no supports such as graphic organizers, annotated text, or visual aids.
- There were missed opportunities for high-level student discussions in some classes visited. For example, in a grade 10 algebra class, students worked with a partner to tabulate a linear equation. Students were observed discussing their math process with their peers. Similarly, students in an ICT geometry class actively engaged in discussion, both during group work and whole class instruction, where both teachers stepped aside to allow student to student discussion, disagreement, and peer explanations of the correct answer to a problem that a student had put on the board. However, in a grade 9 Spanish class, where students watched the video, *Madre Coraje: Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, the students took notes and the teacher paused the video to discuss content. The teacher-directed lesson provided no opportunities for student to student discussion.
- The school wide instructional foci emphasize the importance of promoting higher-order thinking by students through teacher modeling and student engagement in analyzing text through close reading, annotation, and writing. However, across classrooms student annotation practices are inconsistent. For example, in the Global History class, the teacher did not model the annotation of the text, and nine out of ten students observed were underlining but none made any notes in the margins to illustrate their thinking. In an eleventh grade English class, students were reading *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but few were annotating or providing other evidence of high-level interaction with the text. In contrast, the majority of students in a Living Environment class were actively annotating a text on Hodgkin's disease for important information, although what determined "important information" was never clarified. In a tenth grade ELA class, the teacher explicitly modeled a written response to the text students had read, provided students with guidelines to follow, and then allowed students the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking via engagement with the text and a writing task.

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, allowing for teacher voice and teachers assuming leadership roles.

Impact

Teacher inquiry team work contributes to the attainment of Common Core aligned school goals, including improved student learning and teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher leaders have opportunities to assume leadership roles in the school and have a voice in instructional decisions. Teacher leaders spearhead each school team such as the department curriculum development team, small learning communities (SLC) team, ninth grade inquiry teams, and the common planning time team. During the teacher team interview, teachers reported that their leadership roles allow them to have direct insight into student data which informs school-wide instructional decisions. One teacher said, “Because I am a teacher leader, I am meeting with my peers almost every day and I am more aware of student data which help us with our lesson planning.” A second teacher said, “We have a voice in this school, we support each other and we are now including more writing across content areas.”
- Grade level inquiry teams in the ninth grade are engaged in WITsi, in which the teams meet twice weekly to review student writing for a focus 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 a targeted writing skill and understanding of the content. Based on this analysis, teacher teams make decisions on next steps, including the removal of certain writing scaffolds. A review of baseline and current writing samples of students on whom the inquiry is focused indicates clear growth in students’ ability to write complex sentences. For example, a ninth grade student whose baseline writing assessment showed a one-sentence fragment and one run-on sentence in a three sentence paragraph, is now, with the support of writing scaffolds, correctly using conjunctions and appositives.
- When looking at student work as well as data provided by the Office of Student Progress teacher team, departmental common planning teams use tuning protocols to inform curriculum decisions by the department. The Office of Student Progress team is led by an assistant principal and includes the programmers, testing coordinator, data specialist, and Data Driven Classroom (DDC) coordinator. For example, in response to an analysis of student work on the June 2014 Regents exam, the science department added a graphing lab and adjusted the curriculum to increase emphasis on decoding graphic organizers, including Earth Science reference tables. The social studies department revised an economics unit, using information from the DDC and the tuning protocol to include specific content vocabulary for all students, including English language learners.