



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Law, Government and Community Service**

**High School Q494**

**207-01 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11411**

**Principal: Donna Delfyett-White**

**Date of review: April 16, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Donald Conyers**

## The School Context

Law Government and Community Service is a high school with 123 students from grade 11 through grade 12. The school population comprises 81% Black, 12% Hispanic, 1% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 77.4%.

## 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>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>Proficient</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>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The principal supports high expectations through staff training and systems of accountability. The school administrators and guidance staff consistently communicate high expectations to the teaching staff connected to ensuring that students and families understand a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

Staff members are held accountable for set expectations and participate in training and a series of events designed to help students and families understand progress toward a path to college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal has an open door policy with students and families and maintains up-to-date and fluid information on student academic progress so that she is able to communicate, clarify, and assist with planning for student success. Parents indicated that the principal constantly communicates with them and uses every opportunity to discuss student academic and social-emotional development.
- The principal sends teachers data analyses, memoranda, and observation feedback to generate awareness and accountability on the part of teachers concerning high expectations in teaching and student learning. In order to ensure that staff remains focused on improved teaching practice, the principal consistently uses the Danielson Framework for teaching as the anchor document for discussions about craft when meeting with teachers and to drive professional development sessions based on analysis of teacher performance during observations.
- Teachers and administrators meet weekly with students to support their needs leading toward college and career entry. Additionally, teachers volunteer their time to assist in the Apex Learning Credit Recovery program, conducting tutorials for students, cultivating a Regents re-take culture, and engaging students in discussions about progress in classes and how present academic standing matters in the larger scheme of progress towards college and careers. A set of graduating seniors stated, "We have benefitted from the conversations and have more clarity about what we need and want to do next." The guidance counselor frequently analyzes student scholastic and attendance rates and meets with students and parents to create guidance plans that lead first to graduation and then college and career preparation. As a major part of this effort, the principal, cognizant that the school will close in 2016, created a task force to ensure that all students are on the best path to college and careers. The task force meets with students and families to help them determine the best options for students needing to continue their high school experience beyond 2016. For example, the task force is organizing a list of suitable transfer high schools for consideration, helping students and their families consider geography, student interest and motivation, learning needs, and other pertinent factors in their decision-making. Additionally, the principal takes advantage of the school co-location model and sends students to other schools in the building for needed courses and arranges for several students to take college level classes at Queens College and Queensborough Community College campuses.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the school's set of beliefs about how students learn best and to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. While overall student participation and thinking is uneven, instances of higher levels of student thinking and participation are emerging school-wide.

### Impact

Teaching practices that are not fully aligned to beliefs and curricula thwart consistent high quality student engagement in higher-order thinking and production of meaningful student work products for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders reported that students learn best when they are engaged in lessons responding to higher order questions/tasks and participating in student discussions. However, across classrooms visited, these expectations were inconsistently executed in the delivery of lessons. For example, in a grade 11 Participation in Government class, the lesson focused on the relations of police and African American males. Although students were assigned to groups to read one of five different articles, summarize, and state whether they agreed or disagreed with the author, there was a lack of student discussion and any intervention to increase student engagement. The lesson did not produce any close reading of text or meaningful student writing and never reached its intended outcome in examining the role of the law and the concept that no one should be above the law. However, in a forensic science class, students answered questions such as, "What does the study of chromosomes tell us?" and worked in groups to conduct a Karyotypes test to evaluate the size, shape, and number of chromosomes within a cell set to predict potential abnormalities. Students were able to articulate that using karyotyping in crimes to analyze DNA is useful for identifying victims and suspects.
- Across classrooms visited, discussions reflected developing stages of student thinking and uneven student participation. In a grade 11 English class, students read the memoir "Glass Castle" and discussed parental neglect and abuse from the perspective of the parents and children in the book citing evidence from the text to support their positions. However, in a grade 12 English class, students were assigned to one of three groups to write a two-page dialogue for one of the following conflicts: "Racism-A Black-White Issue", "Student Conflict", or "Policeman-Citizen Conflict". In a general consensus, students expressed that they were not certain of why they were doing the assignment or what they were expected to do.
- In a third year Spanish class, students reviewed class notes and exercise sheets regarding vocabulary words, verb tenses, linking words, and words that express opinions in order to prepare to write a 100 word essay in Spanish choosing from topics provided by the teacher. The students worked independently preparing to write the essay. The principal indicated that, "The lesson would have been more rigorous if the students were given the opportunity to discuss their topics, decide on key persuasive points, and brainstorm for main idea and needed vocabulary", as per New York City Language Other Than English (LOTE) instructional practices. The principal agreed that by this time in the students' course of study, extended discussions should be an active part of the learning experience.

## Additional Findings

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

School leaders and teachers are in evolving stages of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and building coherence in curricula and academic tasks that emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills.

### Impact

The school's curricula decisions do not result in all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, having consistent access to rigorous academic tasks that promote higher-order thinking college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal and several of the staff have identified "rigor" as an area of focus to build coherence across the school. In each class, a poster with the word and its definition represents the desired intentions of the school community. However, the curricula units and lesson plans in the areas of science and social studies do not reflect or acknowledge the presence of Common Core Learning Standards or concentrated efforts to highlight the instructional shifts. A review of lesson plans and unit plans across curricula areas revealed a lack of coherence in the strategic integration of the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts.
- A geometry math class lesson plan listed tier two vocabulary words needed for the lesson asking students to write linear equations that satisfy given locus conditions in coordinate geometry. The lesson plan identified a workshop model approach to provide students guided support in order to make meaningful connections while finding the locus of points. The lesson plan included complex examples in word form for selected students who would exceed the scope of the lesson by providing more complex examples. However, there was a missed opportunity for all students to benefit from solving problems in the content of word form.
- Although the principal shared evidence of teachers working in professional development sessions on the crosswalk between the Common Core instructional shifts and the expectations under Domain One of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, most curricula viewed did not provide rich academic tasks that support the cognitive demand of the Common Core Learning Standards. Although some lesson plans reviewed included planning for the instructional shift of academic vocabulary there was no evidence of consistent planning across subjects for the instructional shifts of text-based answers, writing from sources, and staircase of complexity, which align to the school's instructional focus.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

School leaders, teachers, and students gain actionable feedback from rubrics and common assessment results to determine student progress toward goals. Teacher decisions concerning lesson development are driven by the acquired knowledge of student progress toward goals aligned to the curricula and in consonance with student learning goals.

### **Impact**

Teachers and students understand student progress. Teacher decisions concerning lesson development are driven by the acquired knowledge of student progress toward goals aligned to the curricula and in consonance with student learning goals.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- In the fall of 2014, the principal and teachers used the ATS-REDS report to analyze the English language arts (ELA) and the Integrated Algebra Regents results. Teachers verified that students were having difficulty understanding general academic tier two vocabulary words used within the examination questions. As a result, the ELA and math teachers began to incorporate increased numbers of general academic words in student tasks and quizzes. Students now have more daily exposure to complex vocabulary.
- Students reported that classroom teachers use rubrics for projects and spoke about how rubrics guide their performance and give them information about how well they have done overall and on all components of assigned projects. For example, an economics project on marketing products required students to meet acceptable standards outlined in a rubric regarding their presentation, the accuracy of their factual details and their feasibility study. Students used the rubric and had intermediary check-ins with their teacher to make project improvements.
- The principal and assistant principals collect and provide useful achievement data to students and teachers to foster academic improvement and achievement. Administration analyzes common assessment outcomes and meets with teachers to examine scholarship results, and teacher plans for responding to student deficits, supporting teachers to plan more effectively based upon assessment results. The English and science teachers paired to create additional opportunities for students to write and to use complex vocabulary based on words germane to the disciplines. The principal also meets with students to discuss progress and to ensure that the student is receiving necessary support to realize improvement.

<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 during common planning times where they discuss student assessment results, and do joint planning of lessons based on learning outcomes and the goal of increasing rigor school wide. However, their work is not inquiry-based and reflects minimal analysis of student assessment and work.

### Impact

Lack of inquiry-based investigation, limits identification and promotion of pedagogical practice aligned to the Common Core and school goals. Collaborations do not typically result in improved teacher practice or progress for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The math team meets weekly, which is more frequently than other teams. However, these meetings are mainly about planning lessons in accordance with curricula expectations and making some suggestions loosely presented through discussion about what pedagogical moves to make in certain instances based on understanding of student progress, errors, and/or misconceptions.
- The English and social studies department teachers collaborated on the creation of an argumentative essay unit requiring students to read and annotate an article about school technological tracking of students in the name of public safety and learners write an essay presenting a claim and counter claim. The team's work did not include study of the subset of students who demonstrated difficulties with writing or the impact of instructional strategies used. Furthermore, a review of the teacher team agendas and notes revealed a loose connection to analyzing data as well as student writing products that inform creating goals for groups of students.
- Teacher teams have acknowledged that meaningful student engagement is a product of designing coherent instruction. They work together and with school administrators to construct lessons that support instructional outcomes that generate thoughtful learning groups and activities that represent high level thinking. They admit that next steps include more consistent use of student work products to inform and improve teacher practice and student learning outcomes. The teachers and school administrators are beginning to deepen the work across teacher teams so that it consistently impacts student progress and improve teacher practice.
- The social studies and English teachers look at student writing to measure student's improvement in writing in terms of use of richer vocabulary, presentation of a stronger point of view and better organization in the context of the curricula assignment. However the teachers have not yet determined the best way to help students write better or how to document their instructional practice well enough to examine and gauge for true effectiveness.