

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Queens Academy High School

High School Q540

**138-11 35th Avenue
Queens
NY 11354**

Principal: Vasilios Manolios

**Dates of review: April 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael Dantona**

The School Context

Queens Academy High School is a high school with 428 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 37% Black, 39% Hispanic, 9% White, and 12% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 64.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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.	Celebration	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	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	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	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	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and staff ensure school curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts while embedding rigorous academic tasks.

Impact

Curricular alignment is leading to coherence across grades and subject areas, promoting college and career readiness for all students. The school-wide instructional focus on argumentative writing has promoted rigorous academic habits and higher order thinking for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty have adopted the Understanding by Design model to support the development of school curriculum maps. The curriculum map design includes pacing, unit essential questions, enduring understanding, content knowledge, assessments and the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, an essential question within a social studies map asked how industrialization led to a greater involvement in world affairs. The corresponding performance task for the unit of study required students to engage in a debate about “America’s role as the ‘Police Officer’ in the Western Hemisphere.” In addition, to support the math department, the principal secured support from Lehman math consultants to develop Common Core-aligned units of study.
- New York State Regents assessments are utilized to support adjustments to the curriculum. The school staff analyzed item analysis data to support school curricula adjustments, resulting in school leaders and staff identifying argumentation as its instructional focus. The school principal applied for and was accepted into the Transfer School Common Core Institute, who supports the development of argumentative units of study, performance based assessments as well as a school-wide argumentation rubric, which promotes the implementation of rigorous academic tasks for all learners.
- School curriculum maps contain a modification section in support of providing access to English language learners and students with disabilities. For example, a Common Core math unit includes the expected use of manipulatives, a focus on vocabulary, small group work to promote math talk and hands-on-investigations.
- In order to promote college and career readiness for all students, school leaders developed a relationship with Creative Connections to assist in the development of a transition course to support students who are on the verge of graduating. This program provides individualized support for students in preparation for college. In addition, the school has developed an entrepreneurship course designed to prepare and support students with the skills necessary for college and career readiness.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

While school leaders and staff utilize summative and formative assessment data to measure student outcomes, adjust curricula and instruction, this practice is not implemented consistently to make effective adjustments school-wide. Common assessment practices, whereby common skills are evaluated, are at the developing stages.

Impact

Practices to analyze summative and formative assessment data are not fully embedded to accurately measure student progress or to adjust instructional and curricula practices on an ongoing basis to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have been analyzing Regents assessment data. The math teacher team reviewed the Item Skills Analysis from the January math Regents exam and identified areas of need; however, the discussion was not consistent with improving pedagogy to support student needs. The team work revolved around supporting the students with a mandated Regents Seminar course and Academic Intervention Services. Data was not utilized to determine the instructional or curriculum gaps, which may contribute to the mathematical misconceptions, limiting their ability to support the needs of individual students.
- School leaders and staff have developed an argumentative writing rubric with the expectation that all content areas engage in argumentative writing pieces; however, the structure to monitor student progress is at the developing stages. This limits the school's ability to make effective school-wide adjustments to pedagogy and to determine impact on student learning.
- Checks for understanding were evident as teachers circulated through the classroom, providing additional support for students as needed; however, there were missed opportunities to utilize formative assessments and data to make effective adjustments to support groups of students with similar needs. For example, in an English classroom, students began asking similar questions regarding their topic sentence, which the teacher supported with a graphic organizer; however, no model or explicit teaching was provided to ensure that clear expectations were established so that students were aware of their next learning steps. In a math classroom, the teacher planned for the completion of an exit slip; however, time lapsed without the students completing it, limiting the amount of data collected to support the next day's lesson.
- Opportunities for student self-assessment were evident in some classrooms; however, there were missed opportunities for students to evaluate their own work against a rubric. For example, in a social studies class, students were expected to take a stance in favor or in opposition to concealed weapons and determine the three most pertinent arguments. While student groups were able to take a stance they were not given the opportunity to self-assess their work using a rubric.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Classroom pedagogical practices reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best, building coherence across grades and subject areas. Instructional decisions at the school and classroom level support all learners in accessing appropriately challenging tasks so that they may demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff members developed an instructional focus that emphasizes argumentative writing. For example, in an English course, students were required to establish an argumentative writing piece, whereby students had to decide to support or refute the banning of their literature circle books. A student shared that he felt that certain books should be censored as he did not believe students should be reading texts that include poor language. Another student in class shared that he believed that the books should not be censored as even books that contain negative acts can be learned from. In addition, in a Government course, students were required to evaluate arguments in favor of or against concealed weapons. Students were citing textual evidence to support their stance.
- Across classrooms, teachers utilized a variety of strategies and supports to provide access into the lesson for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, such as through the use of video, sentence frames, graphic organizers, choice and audio. For instance, in a social studies classroom, the use of a video depicting the dropping of the atom bomb supported students as they were expected to determine if the United States should have dropped the atomic bomb to end World War II. In a math classroom, students were provided with a video to determine the features of a parabola as they learned to graph a quadratic function. In addition, in an English classroom students were provided with sentence frames to provide peer feedback to support the development of a counterclaim paragraph. For example, "I disagree with your position because... First, I disagree because... Another reason I disagree is because" were provided as means of providing entry into the task.
- School-wide there was alignment of teacher lesson plans to the expectations of the curricula and the Common Core Learning Standards. In an entrepreneurship course, students were expected to analyze their business plans and develop a 30-second pitch as a sales method for their product and were expected to present this pitch to their peers, who provided feedback. In a Global History course, students analyzed one of Winston Churchill's speeches and responded to text-dependent questions to determine if the speech escalated tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. For example, the class was asked questions like, "In the fourth paragraph Churchill says, 'An Iron Curtain has descended across the continent.' What do you think he means by an 'Iron Curtain'?"

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations to staff informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school communicates high expectations to students, especially those expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

School staff is accountable to support school-wide goals and expectations. Students receive feedback and guidance to prepare for their next steps connected to college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations for classroom instruction and professionalism through the use of a staff handbook, memos and a professional development calendar, which support the school-wide instructional focus for argumentation. Teachers explained that they collaboratively decided on the school's instructional focus of argumentative writing and played a role in the development of the school-wide argumentative writing rubric. School leaders hold staff accountable through ongoing cycles of observation and feedback.
- School staff provides support for students and offer advisement using a senior year graduation contract, which indicates the classes and Regents exams needed to graduate. All students receive and are expected to sign the contract. One student expressed that teachers do not allow them to have low expectations and if they are "slacking off" the teachers challenge them to improve. Another student added that the school has a "Star Wall" that allows students to earn stars and as they earn the stars, families receive a positive phone call home. He explained that the "Star Wall" pushes him to try harder. A student shared that they frequently use rubrics and receive feedback from their teachers with next steps, citing the specific emphasis on enhancing his vocabulary. In addition, school leaders have purchased Skedula, an online grading system, which provides students with regular information regarding their performance.
- Students expressed that they have a college counselor who assists them with college applications and how to start a career. In addition, students explain that the College Now classes are preparing them for the next step as they earn credits by completing the courses. A parent explained that the expectations have been raised as her child was able to write a 500 word essay for her college application. In addition, parents expressed that the Apex program is wonderful and that the College Now courses are working and are really good for the kids as they assist with credit accumulation and preparation for college. In addition, parents feel the teachers support their children and have built positive relationships with them.

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

While the majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations, the implementation of an inquiry approach whereby student progress is measured over time is at the developing stages.

Impact

Teacher teams analyze assessment data to support school-wide decisions; however, structures to monitor student data do not yield evidence of growth toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides a variety of opportunities for teachers to collaborate. School leaders have established common planning teams for English, social studies and math as well as a Transfer School Common Core institute team, a professional development team, a Lehman College Math Common Core Team and a Facing History and Ourselves team. The work of the teacher teams has led to the development and implementation of the school-wide instructional focus of argumentative writing. Additionally, teacher team work has resulted in the development of an argumentative writing rubric which is being utilized across content areas.
- Teacher teams review and analyze Regents assessment data. For example, the math department utilize a “Students’ Goal Sheet based on Diagnostic Assessment” to determine areas of need within number sense and operations, algebra, measurement, geometry, statistics and probability. While the team is analyzing data, the diagnostic form is limited in that it does not allow for teachers to drill down to specific standards to support the individual needs of students. In addition, the data being reviewed was from a Regent given three months prior to the analysis, which limits the timeliness and amount of instructional and curricula adjustments that can be made to support teaching and learning.
- Teacher teams have not formalized a structure to focus on groups of students and are in the process of identifying focus students as evidenced by an agenda dated March 31st. Teacher teams explained that the work they are doing will enable them to track students over time moving into next year. In addition, teams are in the process of developing a school-wide data collection tool for the analysis of student argumentative writing pieces as evidenced by an agenda dated March 13th.