



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

HERO High

High School X259

**455 Southern Boulevard
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Kristin Cahill Garcia

**Date of review: May 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek**

The School Context

HERO High is a high school with 231 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 38% Black, 57% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 29% of the students enrolled and girls account for 71%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86.0%.

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	Celebration	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	Proficient
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and staff believe students learn best when students receive teacher supports and engage in partner work. Teachers consistently provide students with a variety of entry points.

Impact

The school's belief that scaffolding student learning experiences supports student achievement and is reflective in teacher practice resulting in meaningful student work that promotes thinking, participation, and discussion.

Supporting Evidence

- Informed by Danielson's competencies, structures and protocols reflective of the school's philosophy are evident across classrooms. Students engage in partnership turn and talks and share strategies with each other in small groups to exchange thoughts and ideas. For example, students in a 9th grade Living Environment class worked in small groups to make predictions about the evolutionary relationship between the dog, fox and wolf based upon structural evidence displayed visually by the teacher. Students then continued to work to prove their hypotheses using molecular evidence, discussing their findings with each other along the way, resulting in high levels of student engagement. An instructional practice observed across numerous classes had students working together collaboratively to close read complex text through assigned roles that included a reader, clarifier, summarizer, connector, illustration analyzer and visualizer.
- Aligned to the instructional shifts, students read nonfiction texts and engage in conversations that demonstrate their thinking. For instance, in a grade 9 English language arts (ELA) class, students read a memoir written by an author about his father, a holocaust survivor. Students work as a reciprocal teaching group to read the second chapter, make a claim about how the author represents his father, and provide evidence from the text to validate their thinking.
- Teachers employed a variety of entry points to engage all students in learning. In a health care careers class, a short public health announcement video about smoking is played first without sound and a second time with sound to address the needs of visual and auditory learners. In addition, English language learners (ELLs) are provided with reading articles in which the teachers "chunk" the text for them and provide them with graphic organizers to ensure comprehension. Teachers purposely group students both homogeneously and heterogeneously based upon the class make-up and lesson objectives to successfully engage all students in challenging tasks.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school's grading policies and use of common assessments are aligned with the school's curricula and are used to determine student progress across grades and subjects; however, students do not have a clear picture of their mastery areas and areas for improvement.

Impact

The school uses common assessments and the analysis of data to track student progress, provide actionable feedback to students, and inform adjustments in units and lesson plans. Nevertheless, students are unable to articulate their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create assessments as part of their curriculum planning work during summer professional development (PD), Monday PD, department meetings and co-planning meetings. In addition, teachers collaborate with the school's college partner, Hostos Community College and the school's industry partner, Montefiore Medical Center to create several rubrics in use across the school, including a writing and a project rubric. Feedback provided is attached to a rubric in a comments section. Comments compliment what the students do well and make explicit suggestions to improve project quality that range from revision ideas to improve writing flow to accepted techniques for referring to research sources.
- Grading policies are aligned to curricula and include community grades, which track several positive non-academic behaviors such as professionalism on Friday trips and timely attendance at school to be used in part to determine whether or not a student is ready to participate in community college classes. Students state that they know how they will be graded on each project, essay, and other assignments through the routine use of rubrics presented at the beginning of each particular task. While students are provided with ample amounts of feedback and use it to improve the quality of their work, they are unable to articulate specific academic goals they must work on to achieve mastery across subject areas.
- All summative assessments are used across the grade and teachers collaborate to create and refine them. Mock Regents exams are administered in the winter and spring to introduce students to these types of assessments and monitor pass rate expectations. End of unit assessments track student progress towards the acquisition of key skills and content. Benchmark assessment tools are used three times per year to measure progress and make instructional modifications. For example, the 9th through 14th grade design of the school makes it necessary for students to be able to read college level text successfully resulting in an emphasis on complex academic vocabulary in curricula and instructional routines. As a result, classroom routines emphasize vocabulary and annotation strategies are evident in written curricula across the school. However, students are unaware of key skills they must focus on to accelerate mastery.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects and for all students. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

The school continuously makes purposeful decisions to build coherence by careful planning, reviewing and modifying curricula enabling all learners to have access to sequenced units of study with academic tasks designed to accelerate learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's lesson plan template is used in all content areas to reinforce higher order thinking and includes modifications to ensure that all learners are provided with scaffolds to enable them to complete tasks. For example, a global studies lesson plan about how the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev affected the Soviet Union includes a short film presentation to address the needs of visual and auditory learners. In addition, English language learners (ELLs) are provided with reading articles in Spanish and English with cartoons to ensure comprehension, while higher achieving students are given more challenging reading articles to ensure rigorous engagement. Most of the perused lesson plans contained pre-meditated open-ended questions the teachers can use during discussion to push student thinking. (b)
- Teacher teams plan and refine academic tasks that focus on authentic reading and writing with regular exposure to career-based tasks and purposely support students through interdisciplinary projects based on real problems in health care. For example, a 9th grade chronic illness interdisciplinary project merges ELA and health care classes and requires students to select a health care problem in their communities and write a paper in which they research the topic, suggest an intervention, include a way to measure the success of their idea, and present their work to their peers and professionals in the field. This project requires students to understand extremely dense technical writing from selected research sources. Students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) receive intensive individual support through co-teaching strategies in Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, while teacher advisors support students during advisory sessions. Students are assisted in understanding academic vocabulary, making citations, and writing from sources utilizing annotation strategies, graphic organizers, and grammar and spell-check technologies, enabling all students to have access to rigorous curricula.
- Mixed department groups, called "common core groups", convene to promote progress towards Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts curricular integration. The English and social studies departments have worked together to develop shared practices around instruction in marshaling evidence in service of an argument. The science and health care careers teachers have worked with a consultant utilizing interdisciplinary project-based learning. The Math department has worked with a specialist on developing more application-based tasks calling for dual density. In addition, the school has developed college readiness exams to measure students' ability to read college-level text and write accurate summaries successfully.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All staff conveys high expectations connected to college and career to families and students.

Impact

Structures that highlight the school's high expectations ensure that all constituents are provided feedback and are accountable, thus preparing students for college and career and higher levels of learning and achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are communicated to teachers beginning with the hiring process, which asks candidates to perform a demonstration lesson and participate in a lengthy interview in which they respond to positive and critical feedback, and demonstrate instructional skill and experience through an examination of their teacher portfolios. When teachers are hired, they meet with the principal for a two-hour on-boarding session to discuss the Teacher Handbook which explains the structure of the school as well as expectations regarding professionalism for teachers. Frequent classroom observations using the Danielson Framework competencies are conducted to measure pedagogical quality and are used to craft ensuing professional development cycles.
- There are several systems to provide families with feedback about their students' performance as well as opportunities for students to practice ownership of their own learning. Weekly outreach by advisors by phone and text, thrice yearly family conferences, and an online grading system keep families abreast of their children's progress. Hostos college staff members also stay in regular contact with families of early college students, communicating information about progress in college classes and registration and withdrawal deadlines.
- Students take ownership of their learning through the identification of academic and personal goals at the beginning of semesters in advisory, the presentation of their work to their families through the student-led conferences, and regular self-assessments during advisory, academic counseling, during reflection after major assignments, and as part of lesson exit tickets. As a result of these supports, students are prepared for the next level.

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

Teacher teams consistently conduct data analysis and reviews of student work. Distributed leadership structures support leadership development and teacher participation in decision making.

Impact

Teacher team work and distributed leadership structures strengthen pedagogical practice and enhance student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- All faculty members are actively engaged throughout the school week and year in professional development and planning that helps them improve their practice of implementing CCLS and the instructional shifts. During Monday professional development, weekly department meetings and weekly meetings with co-teachers, teachers meet in full faculty, department groups, common core groups, and co-planning pairs to plan instruction, analyze and refine tasks and instruction and consider new and adjusted pedagogical approaches. Teaching practices are monitored using Advance data from cycles of observation.
- In all of the different types of meetings, teachers systematically analyze data in order to improve instruction and student outcomes. In department groups, teachers analyze the results of summative assessments at the end of the marking period and make adjustments for the next unit as a result of their analysis. Feedback from college professors and early-college students also informs revisions to curriculum. For example, first-time early college students struggled with accountability for information in reading assigned in advance of class. As a result, science and global studies teachers have explicitly taught into the skill of gathering information from assigned reading on an unfamiliar topic in advance of lectures, and have incorporated that practice into their classes.
- Teachers take an active role in decision-making and leadership that sets the yearly school-wide goals. During a spring retreat, teachers reflect on school-wide progress for the year, assess strengths and weaknesses, and begin to identify goals for the next school year. Over the summer, a smaller group of teachers convene regularly to articulate more specifically these goals and identify outcomes, as well as to create other important guiding structures like the school-wide calendar and the program for the year. During the school year, teachers continue to make decisions about curriculum, instruction and assessment within department groups as part of the school's established distributed leadership structures.