



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Crotona Academy**

**High School X321**

**639 St. Ann's Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10455**

**Principal: Anthony W. Harris**

**Date of review: March 23, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Jorge A. Estrella**

## The School Context

Crotona Academy is a high school with 98 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 41% Black, 54% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 34% of the students enrolled and girls account for 66%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 52.8%.

## 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>Developing</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>Proficient</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 and teachers consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path for college and career readiness. School leaders and staff offer ongoing feedback to families and provide ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance/advisement supports to students.

### Impact

Reciprocal communication with families helps parents understand their child's progress towards goals. Teachers and staff supports promote students' preparation for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff communicate to families the expectations for students' college and career readiness through monthly newsletters, a monthly calendar of school events, open nights for parents, and workshops designed to help parents and students understand what is necessary for students to graduate from high school ready for college. For example, the school invites families to participate in college and career fairs, financial aid opportunities and application workshops, and visits to colleges and universities.
- Families have access to student progress through the Engrade online grading platform that provides parents and students with current information about student progress. Parents shared that they appreciate the access to Engrade, and that teachers offered workshops and tutorials to parents to learn how to use this on-line grading platform. Furthermore, parents stated that they have frequent communication with teachers to discuss student progress.
- School leaders are working in collaboration with Diploma Plus, a Community Based Organization from Boston, to strengthen the college transition phase for students. For example, Diploma Plus provides the school with the services of a college liaison to support students' transition to college by monitoring their college application process. This service is done in collaboration with the school guidance counselor and youth advocates.
- The school partners with South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SoBro), through which youth advocates provide on-going counseling to students by giving them strategies for success, job training and assisting families in crisis. Students and parents reported that students have the opportunity to gain work experience by performing paid internships through this partnership. Participation in this internship program is linked to their academic progress where students must sustain high grades across content areas and working towards meeting their graduation requirements.
- Parents believe their children are engaged and safe in school. Parents reported that, school leaders and teachers are knowledgeable, motivating, friendly and approachable, and the support and guidance students receive are positioning them to move to the next level. Students affirmed this, and shared that they are proud to attend the school. Students stated, "I feel respected and free to ask any question without being judged", and "My principal and teachers are always available to support me if I have any challenges with my school work or any other personal issues."

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and student discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Impact

Some students are not involved in appropriately challenging tasks or discussions that lead to high-level thinking and meaningful work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal indicated that the instructional focus of the school is writing in content areas. Despite curricula prescribing Common Core Learning Standards instructional shifts within lessons, in some classrooms visited, students were not reading text in depth, and writing was limited to short answers on worksheets. There was evidence of writing in four out of the seven classrooms visited, and the quality of student work products and discussions varies across the school. Furthermore, the writing observed ranged from a one sentence journal entry to an argument based paragraph, displaying incongruence between the school's goal of improving writing stamina and current instructional practices. For example in United States History class, students used rubrics to write their essays and used textual evidence to support their claims and counterclaims. However, in an English class, students were completing worksheets in a study skills workbook.
- Most of the lessons observed were teacher centered, and discussion trends were teacher-student-teacher. Therefore, in some classes visited, students were passively engaged. Some teachers did not encourage students to think deeply or contribute to the discussion, thereby hindering opportunities for students to articulate their thinking with their peers. For example, in an art class, there were several students who were ready to engage in a deeper conversation of their art perception. However, the teacher missed the opportunity to promote a richer discussion about the art work when a student shared a connection of the art work to music. When the student attempted to explain his rationale, the teacher did not encourage the interchange.
- The use of technology provides students with an additional instructional tool to support their learning and to expand their knowledge. All classrooms visited have Smartboards and computers. However, in most cases, teachers did not take advantage of the SmartBoard as an interactive tool to enhance students' engagement while addressing multiple learning styles. Instead, Smartboards were used as a projection screen, and in some instances, the display was not properly set so it was not possible for all students to read the displayed text.
- Despite the diverse learners in each class, the teaching strategies and the materials did not consistently support the range of academic need. In many classrooms, students were expected to complete the same task without differentiation of the process or the product.

## 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 faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and to the instructional shifts with an emphasis on analyzing texts and increased application of knowledge. Curricula and academic tasks do not yet reflect consistent planning to meet the needs of the school's diverse learners.

### Impact

A lack of consistency in alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and in the integration of the instructional shifts limits student engagement in rich learning experiences. Curricula and tasks do not provide all students with access, and do not yet cognitively engage a diversity of learners. There is inconsistency in planning activities that will challenge students of different skill levels.

### Supporting Evidence

- The instructional team in each core subject area is in the process of refining Common Core aligned curricula, including the scope and sequence for social studies and mathematics. Teachers stated that the English curriculum is aligned to the common core and that they utilize materials from Engage NY. However, the curriculum for Living Environment is currently being developed with support from the Common Core Teaching Fellows Program.
- Some teacher units and lesson plans provide evidence of planning in building student skill to engage in rigorous tasks for all learners. However, there is inconsistency in planning for the integration of the instructional shifts. For example, the physics teacher planned questions to promote higher order thinking such as, "What do you think these two diagrams is showing you?" and "What similarities and differences have you noticed between circuit A and circuit B?" In addition, the lesson plan was designed to offer choices to students for their lab work. However, this practice was not evident in other lessons plans, and some lesson plans did not provide evidence of planning for a differentiated approach to address the needs of all students.
- As the school transitions their work to align to the instructional shifts, some lesson plans emphasize a high level of rigor, and provide a menu of strategies or leveled resources for from which students utilize or choose to better understand the subject matter or content areas. However, this practice is inconsistent across grades and content areas. For example, a Geometry lesson plan showed the use of questions that promote higher-order thinking skills by having students analyze different triangles to make connections to the Pythagorean Theorem. However, other lesson plans do not reflect scaffolded questions designed to promote higher levels of interaction among students.
- Some lesson plans reviewed reflected that the same classwork is planned for every student, despite the range of skill level in each class. There is inconsistent evidence of planning for implementing strategies to support students at risk or higher achievers. In addition, in some instances, homework assignments do not offer opportunities to challenge students to deepen their understanding of the concepts, skills and strategies to solve mathematical problems.

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

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula, and inconsistently provide feedback to teachers and students regarding student achievement. Formative assessments do not always provide a clear portrait of student mastery.

### **Impact**

Pedagogical strategies for assessing students are inconsistent across content areas, limiting effective feedback on next learning steps for teachers and students. Varying use of checks for understanding hinder the development of effective instructional adjustments in some classes.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Some work displayed in bulletin boards indicates specific, actionable feedback to students. However, feedback provided to students is inconsistent across subjects. For example, while students' science work posted contained teacher's actionable feedback, social studies work posted was marked with checks, grades, and comments such as "Excellent."
- Each teacher has developed a course specific grading policy that incorporates components such as class work, quizzes, behavior, homework, attendance and projects. However, the percentage of each component varies across classrooms. As a result, some students are not able to articulate the rationale for the school grading policy or the point value of different assessments in their classes. In addition, some students are not aware of their levels in different content areas or their next learning steps.
- Students reported that some teachers provide them with rubrics to help them determine what is needed to meet the standards, and with verbal or written feedback to support them in their next learning steps. However, some students shared that feedback and supports are not always provided to them in all subject areas. For example, student work in a study skills workbook used in English class did not contain teacher feedback.
- Teacher checks for understanding are inconsistent and most checks for understanding observed during classroom visits were in the form of teacher canvassing of the classroom and supporting small groups. Across classrooms visited, some teachers were observed circulating around the classroom, observing students, and providing verbal feedback to individuals or groups of students. However, the practice of annotating students' strengths and areas for improvement and adjusting the lesson based on notes recorded was not observed consistently across classes, and there was limited evidence that teachers use formative assessment data to adjust instruction or provide targeted support for students to meet the lesson objectives. Furthermore, while some teachers use exit slips to gauge student mastery of learning objectives, the use of exit slips was not consistent. For example, an exit slip distributed in a math class was vague and did not capture meaningful information regarding students learning.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place to build teacher leadership capacity.

**Impact**

Structured teacher team collaboration supports teachers' professional learning. Teachers are empowered to take leadership roles in the school community and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers meet frequently in content area teams. During a teacher team meeting, teachers were observed utilizing a protocol to review student work to determine the implications for instruction and to develop appropriate interventions to make adjustments to curricula. Teachers are currently engaged in the third cycle of inquiry process, focusing on identified areas of student need in citing evidence in content writing.
- Teachers shared that they are involved in professional development sessions to deepen their understanding of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and that they support each other through teacher led inter-visitations cycles. During these visits, teachers conduct low inference observations to provide each other with feedback regarding teaching practice and students outcomes. Staff members participate in on-going in-house and network sponsored professional leaning sessions, some of which are led by teachers. For example, all teachers have participated in a professional development series around effective practices for teaching teams, giving effective feedback to students, and family engagement strategies.
- The distributive leadership structure empowers teachers to assume leadership roles and to support the professional development of their colleagues. For example, lead teachers develop agendas for teacher team meetings, and share meeting notes and next steps with the school leaders. The principal explained that teacher leads share their focus across departments to norm an understanding of best practice. Examples of shared best practice include literacy supports, scaffolds, and differentiation strategies.
- Teachers reported that their voice is valued in the instructional decision-making process, and that teachers have opportunities to lead school wide initiatives. For example, an English teacher promoted the use the Engrade on-line grading system for all stakeholders, and offered workshops for parents to learn how to access and use Engrade.