



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Community School for Social Justice

High School X427

**350 Gerard Avenue
Bronx
NY 10451**

Principal: Sue-Ann Rosch

**Date of review: April 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Kristine Mustillo**

The School Context

Community School for Social Justice is a high school with 320 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 30% Black, 68% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 80.0%.

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	Well Developed
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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based teacher-led professional learning collaborations that are focused on continually growing practices to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in strengthened instructional practice, built teachers' leadership capacity, deepened school-wide instructional coherence, and improved student outcomes for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher department teams meet by department and focus on curriculum alignment and development. Grade level teacher teams focus on student performance data, and teacher professional learning communities focus on shared professional growth. Teachers across teams meet as a planning committee to develop professional development opportunities to support individual and group goals as well as ensure that team learning is shared school-wide. The planning team has developed an inter-visitation model to support professional growth towards goals, which has resulted in increased opportunities for student engagement in targeted peer discourse and group work, and a reduction in teacher centered instruction.
- Teacher Teams identified a need to improve the quality of student writing across content. English Language Arts teaches introduced an approach to support students in developing writing pieces that demonstrate approved rubric requirements. This approach was adopted across grades and content areas so that students produce essays where they make and argument (M), support with evidence (E), analyze the evidence (A) and link back to the main point of the argument (L). Teachers also participate in professional development in the Hochman writing program to support students who need more guided instruction in paragraph development, and to meet the needs of students who are ready to graduate from the MEAL approach to more sophisticated writing formats that allow them to develop their own style and voice. As a result of this inquiry work, assessment data demonstrates an increase of competent and accomplished ratings on performance-based assessments and aligned performance tasks school-wide.
- Teachers develop individual professional and teacher team goals aligned to the instructional domain of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In order to increase student engagement, teachers focused on increasing and improving student discussion opportunities. Teachers lead the work introducing discussion protocols, and identifying increased opportunities for Socratic Seminar. Across classrooms, there is evidence that discussion protocols are being used to encourage students to demonstrate their understanding and engage more fully in discussions and debates.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teaching practices reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. However, teacher use of strategies to ensure engagement and ownership of learning by all students was not evident in some classes.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms there was evidence of strategies to engage students in discussion. In a grade 10 Global History class, students participated in conversations exploring the political and moral messages of Ghandi quotes. In a grade 12 Civics class, students participated in discussions regarding gun control laws and minimum wage. In a grade 10 English class, students engaged in Socratic seminar, analyzing articles on non-violence in relation to *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Work products generated across these classrooms evidence students collecting, organizing, analyzing, and evaluating information to make and defend claims.
- In a grade 11 Algebra class, students completed Do Now problems, exploring the characteristics of polynomials through a carousel approach, providing feedback on problems and selected strategies to their tablemates. Following the task, students had to work together to reflect on challenges or misconceptions the group faced. In a grade 9 Algebra class, students had to represent the population of countries using exponents to demonstrate how scientific notation can be applied meaningfully to real world situations. Students worked in groups to collect additional information about the wealth, area, life expectancy, and longevity of citizens and answered questions based on data gathered.
- Students in a grade 9 Living Environment class worked with partners to read passages of information connected to their selected topic of study within a unit on genetic disease. Students were asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the information presented in each article based on a rubric. However, in grade 10 science class, student engagement was limited as students rotated through centers conducting plant observations. Students worked on collecting observational data while three teachers monitored groups and clarified instructions.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty align curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts across units and tasks. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks, and embedded in a coherent way across grades and content areas.

Impact

Planning practices result in units, lessons and tasks across grades and subject areas that emphasize higher order thinking skills, and promote college and career readiness for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- As a member of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, the curriculum at each grade level and in each subject area is aligned to the Consortium's guiding principles around curriculum, instruction and assessment. Curricula design is based on student engagement in worthy inquiry-based, higher-order thinking tasks that help develop the students' skills, knowledge and habits for college and career readiness and that provide access for learners at all levels. This set of principles drives curricula development, instruction and the performance-based assessment system. As a result, backwards planning is embedded in the curricula planning process. The school's participation in the Consortium has rooted work in the instructional shifts. The school uses Regents-approved graduation level rubrics that require, in all four core subject areas, that students make a claim, support it with text-based evidence, justify their reasoning, make deep connections, and then present their completed paper orally to a panel of peers and adults and defend their thinking.
- Habits of Mind and Habits of Work skills are purposefully embedded within curricula units and are supported through a daily advisory program. The structure of all units includes an end of unit project such as creating a non-profit organization to address a social justice topic. This involves researching an issue in current and historical states and creating a budget and plan that addresses major issues. As part of family group, students are supported in developing organizational skills using backwards planning to schedule work for such projects. Students schedule time for research, practice using tools such as index cards and graphic organizers to collect and sort information and receive ongoing peer and teacher support throughout the process.
- Throughout curricula units across grades and content areas, and for English language learners and students with disabilities, there is planning for multiple opportunities for all learners to demonstrate their thinking utilizing discussion, debate, note taking, observation and reporting, essay writing and presentations that integrate technology. Planning includes providing students with opportunities to engage in Socratic seminars around societal issues such as gun control and the impact of slavery on present day America. In addition, lesson plans include providing students with opportunities to conduct research and prepare notes and questions to guide their conversations. Teachers consistently plan to engage students in high-level conversations around complex topics supported through literature circles, fish bowls, and text-based protocols, and lessons plans include provisions for students to participate in multiple opportunities to explore content information in various forms.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments and rubrics to create a clear picture of student progress towards goals.

Impact

Formative and summative assessment data provides teachers with a clear portrait of student mastery. Unit tasks and formal Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBAT) track student progress and inform curricula and instructional decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- All curricula and instruction is planned with the end in mind using Regents approved graduation level rubrics. This is a Consortium requirement for all four core subject areas, and expects students to make a claim, support the claim with text based evidence, justify their reasoning, make deep connections and present their paper to a panel which questions and challenges, necessitating students defend their thinking. Unit tasks before the formal PBAT utilize the same rubric, allowing students and teachers to gain meaningful feedback on student progression towards the standard. The use of Google drive supports timely feedback and ongoing communication with teachers and students regarding mastery of learning standards.
- Co-teachers working with a cohort of English language learners identified students struggling with vocabulary and comprehension. The teachers planned a second semester class taking a humanities approach to content instruction and the integration of English as a second language strategies such as front loading vocabulary, previewing text, building background knowledge, and accessing leveled resources on grade level content that reduce word count. As a result of this approach, the pass rate for the English language learners in this class increased to 85% pass rate from 66%.
- In English language arts, in order to prepare students for the Regent exams, teachers use Common Core Learning Standards aligned mock exams to measure student progress towards the expectations of the standards. Following the fall mock Regents, teachers identified the need to strengthen instructional scaffolds for special education students. English language arts teachers increased their co-planning with teaching specialists and expanded their use of leveled resources connected to rigorous content, and saw an increase of special education students attaining proficiency on the second mock exam. In November, 52% of targeted students passed the exam with an average student score of 58%. In April, 65% of targeted students passed with an average score of 64%.
- The social studies team noticed an overwhelming majority of students struggling with developing thesis statements and citing appropriate sources. The social studies team worked with the science team to provide increased opportunities for students to practice and develop these skills. Teachers state the data analysis indicates that over 70% of students in grade 9 can develop thesis statements, and over 90% of students in upper grades are proficient at this skill. In addition, teachers have seen 90% of students using citations in their writing, and are working to support the use of proper citation school-wide.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school has established a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations to staff, provides training, and has established a system of mutual accountability for those expectations. Teacher teams and staff students establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates high expectations for all learners.

Impact

Structures for communication and collaboration result in a culture of mutual accountability. Guidance and advisement support all learners, including high need sub-groups, in owning their educational experience and preparing for post-secondary life.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is a participant in the Progressive Redesign Opportunity for Schools of Excellence (PROSE). As part of this collaborative professional learning experience, teachers develop individual professional goals aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching, taking into consideration schools goals and their individual growth needs. The school has identified goals in the instructional domain. For example, teachers are working to increase student engagement through discussion techniques, increasing opportunities for students to apply mathematical concepts to real world situations, and improving the balance of fiction and non-fiction text within units of study. Teachers participate in two peer observations each year along with administrative observations and have additional opportunities for mid-year reflections. Debriefs consistently include evidence of impact on student performance, and a sharing of progress and new learning with colleagues.
- As a New York Performance Standards Consortium school, students participate in the Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBATs). Students participate in tasks across content areas that require conducting research, evaluating sources, developing thesis statements and presenting to peers and teachers with opportunities to question and challenge. PBATs ask students to answer questions such as, "Should the United States have entered World War I?," explore the lasting impact of slavery in present day America, and discuss and compare text themes in books such as *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*. These projects convey high academic expectations associated with college and career readiness to students and teachers alike as they work to design rigorous tasks that meet the requirements of the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.
- Incoming freshmen are assigned to a family group prior to the start of school year. Twelve to fifteen students are assigned to a staff member, and they remain together for the next four years. Family group meets to support the academic and personal behaviors associated with college and career readiness as students grow. In August, family groups meet to participate in team building activities, explore the school and discuss the academic and behavioral expectations for the upcoming year. Each Monday, students check-in with advisors around pressing concerns. Throughout the week, students receive guidance in study skills and organization, engage in a review of grades, attendance, credits and assignments using Skedula, and participate in games that address group dynamics. Upper classman participate in college research, essay and application development, college visits to explore options, and financial aid workshops with their parents.