



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

High School for Contemporary Arts

High School X544

**800 East Gun Hill Road Street
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Tilsa Rodriguez-Gonzalez

**Date of review: April 23, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Elena Rovalino**

The School Context

High School for Contemporary Arts is a high school with 497 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 38% Black, 59% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 31% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 81.7%.

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	Developing
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	Developing
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	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	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

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

Findings

All teachers are engaged in professional collaborations, and the use of an inquiry approach is developing across the teams.

Impact

The implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards is beginning to emerge. The assessment of student work does not yet result in improved pedagogical teacher practice or student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Department teams meet daily to look at student work with the use of protocols, read professional articles, and analyze data. Grade teams meet on alternating weeks where counselors join the team to go over cohort scholarship data and target students who need PM school or tutoring. The Staff Development Committee meets every Tuesday to do parent outreach, decide on topics for discussion, and plan professional development sessions. Members of this team serve as facilitators for the department teams.
- Recently, the teams read about the seven norms of collaboration from the Center for Adaptive Schools. The mathematics team met to review the work of one student who had to answer two geometric questions based on a diagram. Teachers then filled out a sheet titled, HSCA Common Planning Time-Teacher Teams QR 4.2, which included sections such as task, application to teaching, and reflection. The work of the teacher teams loosely connects to the goals of the school. Student results have showed improvement in the English Regents which went from 65% passing to 72% passing in June 2014; however, all other Regents results are in a downward trend, algebra went from 49% to 42%, US History went from 78% to 66%, and global history went from 61% to 43% passing.
- The new school leader has recently developed a structure to include teachers in the decision-making process and to give teachers a voice in the professional development topics that the school offers. The principal meets with the School Development Committee, which is comprised of teachers from each content areas, and they are beginning to collaborate on professional development topics that align to current teacher performance trends.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points for students to engage in the lesson and demonstrate their learning.

Impact

Student engagement and participation is uneven and demonstrations of higher order thinking skills are inconsistent across classes.

Supporting Evidence

- In an English class, students were engaged in a text –based discussion about what the actions and the language revealed about the characters in *The Crucible*. Students were supported with a graphic organizer to highlight the nature of the characters using specific textual evidence. Everyone was engaged, and their thinking was evident in the discussions that took place at each of the tables. The teacher went around the room providing support and answering questions.
- In a social studies class, students read articles about the minimum wage, but no scaffolds were provided to support students with disabilities and English language learners. For example, students had been given an article to read entitled, “A New Day for the Minimum Wage”, and had to write a summary of the first paragraph in their own words. Looking at one of the student’s paper, it was evident that he copied the paragraph verbatim; the teacher explained that he was a student with special needs. No scaffolds or supports were provided to this student to meet his needs. Furthermore, there were missed opportunities in this lesson to engage students in a real life high-level discussions dealing with the minimum wage in the United States.
- In a US History and Government class, students were listening to a portion of an audio recording of FDR’s “Four Freedoms” speech from January 1941 along with a copy of the printed text for them to read as the speech played. Students in their groups have to respond to the question, “According to President Roosevelt, how is the nation facing a threat that was different from any threats it has ever faced before?” Students were given opportunities to engage in the lesson through the use of audio, visuals and discussion. However, in other classes, students were not engaged in high order thinking and were left disconnected from the work.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Units of study are aligned to the standards, and teachers are in the process of aligning their lesson plans to standards.

Impact

Most lessons are not yet aligned to the rigor of standards leaving students inconsistently engaged in higher order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has hired consultants from Generation Ready to write curriculum units for all content areas using a modified Understanding by Design template which include a brief overview, enduring understandings, essential questions, Common Core standards, content standards, content, skills and practices, vocabulary, learning activities, assessments, and resources. Units reviewed in economics, chemistry, earth science, algebra, geometry, and English language arts all follow the same format. Teachers design their own lesson plans; however, most lesson plans are not aligned to the Common Core or content standards.
- Units of study and lesson plans reviewed, inconsistently demonstrate the use of multiple entry points for English language learners or students with disabilities, which comprise 31% of the student population. There is no evidence of how process, content or products will be differentiated to meet the needs of varied levels of students in order to reach a level of rigor that would challenge students at different levels. For example, units in economics, and participation in government list turn and talk and group discussions under the learning activities section, but there is no indication of how groups will be determined nor is any differentiated work that student will be doing listed or described.
- Some lesson plans and units inconsistently provide opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills in order to expose students to rigorous instruction. For example, English units include a combination of literary and informational texts as well as text-based questions designed to advance student understanding of the essential question, and enduring understandings. A lesson plan had the aim, "How can we analyze the rapid development of the relationship between Romeo and Juliet and the famous balcony scene". Close reading of plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* require students to use text-based evidence to answer the aim question using inference strategies and deep analysis of text. However, most other units lacked evidence of opportunities to engage students in higher order thinking.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

The school is beginning to use common assessments to measure student progress. Checks for understanding are inconsistently used to adjust instruction and provide support for students.

Impact

Teachers' inconsistent use of data leads to limited opportunities to adjust curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of students across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has access to a data tracker provided by New Visions, which helps to identify students individually and by cohort in order to monitor their progress toward graduation. Counselors and grade team teachers meet regularly to assess what students in their grade need and determine what tutoring can be provided.
- Common assessments are beginning to emerge at the school. Recently, mock regents were given to assess progress, although most data is not yet available, the social studies results indicated that writing was poor and many students did not answer that section of the exam. In response, a class in current events was created to address their needs. Teachers during a team meeting indicated that this semester, for the first time, they have started to look at the item analysis from the Regents exam from January to identify trends. However, there is no evidence yet of adjustments made to units or lessons to address areas of need across the school.
- Teacher's use of checks for understanding is starting to develop; however, these checks do not yet lead to a change in the lesson to address gaps in the learning. For example, in an Instructional Co-Teaching algebra class, students were working on how to use permutation in probability. Teacher called on student to explain the solution and steps for the problem. The teacher then asked, did everyone get 30? Three students raised their hand out of 15 students, teacher responded "nicely done" and moved on leaving the rest of class unclear as to how to solve the problem. Later in that lesson, students were working on another problem and one student was called to share the steps he took to solve the problem. The teacher then asked, "did everyone get 60?" No one raised his or her hand. The teacher moved on without re-teaching or reviewing what students needed to do.
- In an Algebra II class students were working in groups and a few students in the group did not understand how to solve the problem. They called the teacher to come over to assist. The teacher went around and tried to assist students unsuccessfully. A student who looked frustrated then said, "he does not know how to help, I go after school and ask another teacher to help because he does not know how". In contrast, in an English class students were working in pairs on a task based on *The Crucible*. The teacher went around assessing students' understanding and recorded on her notebook how students were doing on citing evidence, analyzing the characters and if they were able to complete the task. Every student was engaged in rich conversations around the characters Abigail, Proctor, Parris and Mr. and Mrs. Putman.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

The new principal consistently communicates high expectations to the entire staff using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Guidance supports are developing to help students move to the next level.

Impact

Teachers continue to need training on the Danielson Framework. Some students are unprepared to advance to the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Through frequent observation, the new principal and administrative team hold teachers accountable to the rigor of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teacher observation reports show evidence of written communication regarding expectations on the four domains. During the team meeting, teachers were asked about which areas of the Danielson they have received training this year. Teachers were only able to reference the indicators of the quality review such as 1.1 and 2.2, but one teacher indicated that although they have been introduced to the Danielson Framework, more training is still needed in this area.
- Parents shared that the guidance team provides support with the college process. A parent indicated that her child received support and guidance in the process of filling out college applications and that the counselor helped her family with the financial aid process. Four counselors and one college advisor support the social and emotional development of students as well as the college process at this school. However, students were very articulate in sharing that the school is unorganized and that programming is problematic. Students indicated that they have been mis-programmed and that they had repeated courses that they already passed. One student shared that she is currently in an algebra class that she already passed, and that this prevents her from moving on to the next level of math classes.
- A culture of learning has been established at this school; student expectations are displayed in classrooms regarding attendance, behaviors, academics and a culture of college readiness has been established. Students speak highly about the English classes that are getting them ready to attend and be successful in college. The Advanced Placement English Literature class holds students to high expectations; however, students indicate that most of their other classes are not as rigorous.