



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**High School of American Studies at Lehman  
College**

**High School X696**

**2925 Goulden Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10468**

**Principal: Alessandro Weiss**

**Date of review: February 25, 2015  
Reviewer: Mimi Fortunato**

## The School Context

The High School of American Studies at Lehman College is a high school with 385 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 7% Black, 15% Hispanic, 54% White, 22% Asian students, 1% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 2% 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 96.0%.

## 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>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the staff and have a system of accountability for those expectations. The school partners with families in the establishment of a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students. School leaders, faculty and staff provide detailed feedback and guidance/advisement supports for all learners.

### Impact

The school's culture exemplifies mutual accountability for shared high expectations. The school's successful partnership with families supports student progress towards college and career readiness and success. Guidance/advisement supports ensure that all students own their educational experience, and are prepared for success in college.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to staff through ongoing reciprocal communication to all members of the school community. Teachers shared that they frequently communicate with the principal regarding their accountability for progress towards individual and shared goals. All teachers develop professional goals aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school's instructional goals. Recurrent shared reflection on observation report data and scholarship report meetings with the principal and assistant principal provide actionable feedback to teachers. In addition, all teachers are engaged in ongoing professional development and collaborations in which school leadership and teachers assume mutual accountability for meeting established expectations. All teachers maintain logs of their participation in professional development, and many teachers attend off-site professional development workshops throughout the school year and summer. Teachers assume responsibility for turn keying their learning through the facilitation of professional development workshops for colleagues.
- Parents actively partner with the school in efforts to increase the school's limited resources. The Parent Association raised over \$200,000 this year to support instructional and enrichment programs for students. Parents affirmed the strength of the home-school partnership, and shared that they are in frequent communication with the parent coordinator, teachers, and the principal, and that they feel that their children receive social and academic support. One parent stated that her child's high school experience has been the best educational experience thus far, and all families present at the parent meeting asserted that this was true for their children as well.
- Guidance counselors support assigned students for the duration of their high school experience, and meet with students on a regular basis to assess their progress toward graduation. Students shared that teachers and school leaders provide them with personalized motivation to meet established expectations. The school is sited on the Lehman College Campus, and a strong partnership with Lehman College provides students with access to a wide range of college courses and immersion in the college experience.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers create and use assessments and rubrics that align with the school's curricula. Content specific teacher grading policies include formative and summative elements, and teacher assessment practices across most classrooms include checking for understanding and the use of student self-assessment.

### Impact

While assessments provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement, grading policies do not always offer a clear portrait of student participation, mastery or progress towards goals. Consequently, students are not always certain regarding how some elements of their progress are measured. In some classes, as teacher practice does not yet reflect the use of checks for understanding and effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs, students are not always aware of their next learning steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet frequently with students to discuss their progress in class or on assignments, and the school places a high priority on providing detailed feedback on student work. Teachers use assessments and rubrics to provide feedback to students, and some teachers offer students multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery. For example, in all math classes, students have the opportunity to participate in tutoring sessions and retake quizzes until they demonstrate mastery. However, feedback on some students' English and math assignments consisted primarily of a numerical grade and marks in red pen of a ✓ or an X.
- Each teacher sets his or her own grading policy, and shares this with students in a contract distributed at the start of each course. To the extent possible, one teacher teaches each course, ensuring alignment of summative assessments and curricula. Teachers have developed department specific grading policies that incorporate formative and summative assessments such as exams/quizzes, projects, homework, and class participation. However, as these policies are not consistent across content areas, and as the formulas contain a number of redundant elements, the information provided to teachers and students does not always provide a clear assessment of mastery of learning standards. Teachers develop grades for student participation and class work in each lesson. However, some teachers were observed used marks of ✓ and ✓ + to grade students' participation during class, which provided limited information regarding actionable feedback to teachers and students regarding student mastery.
- In most classes, teachers use checks for understanding and student self-assessment to adjust instruction. The Spanish department has created a common rubric for assessing daily class participation that includes a student self-reflection component. A biology teacher clarified the lab assignment to groups of students regarding how bacteria are transformed to produce green fluorescent protein. However, in some classes, teachers were not observed noting formative assessment data or checking for understanding, and students were not always aware of next learning steps. For example, a number of students in a global history class had not begun the assignment of a textbook analysis at the end of the allotted timeframe, and the teacher made no adjustment as he moved on to the next phase of the lesson, which included presentations of the analysis.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula align to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricular and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills that teachers coherently embed across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

Curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Across all content areas, coursework aligns to college readiness expectations so that all learners, including students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers have developed curricula across all content areas that promote coherence in the grades 9 through 12 and post-secondary continuum, including advanced placement and other classes at the college level. The principal has established a key instructional goal of preparing students for success at competitive colleges, and teachers incorporate non-fiction and expository text and writing on demand activities to deepen student preparedness for high-level college work. An English language arts lesson planned for students to read scholarly articles in an analysis of *A Dry September* in a unit entitled *Caste and Outcast*.
- The school offers a range of courses that scaffold college readiness aligned curricula and build competencies for all learners. The principal and faculty developed a research methodology curriculum for freshman co-taught with a librarian from Lehman College, and created a virtual library to support students' research activities. In addition, the school has created a grammar course for freshman taught by the principal, and teachers developed a series of post-advanced placement elective courses such as *European History between the Wars* and *Disco to Obama*.
- The school places a priority on the skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, and teachers work collaboratively to ensure a high level of rigor across grade levels and content areas, and to embed higher-order skills across grades for all learners. In all math courses, teachers have shifted from algorithmic instruction to focus more time on problem-solving skills. An algebra lesson plan included a set of problems scaffolded for heterogeneously grouped students who would select and solve problems and share their solutions with members of their group, ensuring that all students had an opportunity to demonstrate their thinking and build skills through collaboration with peers.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teacher practices reflect coherence around a set of beliefs regarding how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

### **Impact**

The school's coherent teaching practices ensure that all learners are engaged in appropriately challenging and rigorous tasks that result in rich discussions and the production of meaningful student work products.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Across classrooms, lessons consistently demonstrated the school's shared beliefs that students learn best in a non-competitive environment in which students work together to achieve a common goal. Teachers consistently provided students with opportunities to demonstrate critical thinking through analysis, asked students to engage in writing, and expected students to support their position with textual evidence. Students in a grade 11 English class presented their analysis of the main characters in *Wuthering Heights* to the class, and student groups facilitated a class discussion with the expectation that all students provide textual evidence to support their claims.
- Lessons observed provided evidence of a school-wide focus on a high level of student ownership of group discussion and debate. In an economics class on free market capitalism, students presented their research to the class, and facilitated a class discussion on the possible causes of Radio Shack's recent bankruptcy claim. In this class, students presented their claims, provided textual evidence for their claims from scholarly articles, and displayed a quote from an article that supported their position on the Smart board as they solicited questions and comments from their peers.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms, students worked in groups to collaboratively solve problems or complete assigned tasks. Students in a math class solved problems together, shared their thinking and extended their peers' thinking. In this class, a student said, "My mind was just blown. I knew how to do this and forgot it, and then my friend just helped me. Now I get it even better. He just blew my mind, and explained this in a totally different way!"

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The principal ensures that the vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry based, structured grade level and content area professional collaborations that promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts, and align practice to the school's instructional goals. An embedded distributed leadership structure enables effective teacher leadership.

### Impact

Ongoing teacher collaborations strengthen teacher instructional practice, promote school-wide coherence, and ensure continued progress toward goals for all learners. Effective teacher leadership plays an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- All teachers meet regularly in grade and content specific teams to analyze student work, identify student need and inform goals for students. Teachers regularly engage in ongoing professional reflection and collaboration. They have adapted protocols to look at the outcomes of assessments, identify student needs and develop an action plan to address next steps. A team of grade 9 teachers and the guidance counselor analyzed samples of work across content areas from a student referred to the team. During this meeting, each teacher presented a sample of work from the student, shared an analysis of the students' demonstration of critical thinking skills, and solicited low-inference non-evaluative responses from their peers. Following this presentation, teachers strategized next steps to implement across content areas that might include additional instructional and guidance/advisement supports.
- Distributed leadership is embedded within the school's culture. Teacher leaders facilitate weekly department and grade level meetings and teachers assume an integral role in supporting colleagues and making instructional decisions that affect student programming and curricula development. For example, teachers develop courses based on identified areas of student need and interest, and present those courses to students in a published course catalog.
- Teachers assume a range of leadership roles, including serving on committees such as the technology committee, or acting as lead teachers for grade level or content area teams. Other teachers are enrolled in leadership programs, completing their internships at the school. Teachers indicated that they that they have significant voice in key instructional decisions, and stated that school leadership takes their perceptions and findings into consideration. Teachers shared that they collaboratively restructured the marking periods to four per year to allow for an interim progress report and an extended opportunity for students to demonstrate mastery.