



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Cobble Hill School of American Studies**

**High School K519**

**347 Baltic Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11215**

**Principal: Anna Maria Mule**

**Date of review: March 1, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

## The School Context

Cobble Hill School of American Studies is a high school with 588 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 64% Black, 26% Hispanic, and 4% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 20% students with disabilities. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 82.8%.

## 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	<b>Celebration</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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that all curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and that higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and tasks.

### Impact

Curricula are well planned and coherent across grades and subjects, cognitively engage all students, and promote college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- In a study of the Warring States period students collaboratively annotate text in response to guided questions such as, “Is it more important for government to provide its people with justice or stability and order?” Based on agreement or disagreement with the text’s perspective, students collectively come to consensus on a solution to restore social and political order. Students’ annotations provide opportunity for them to analyze complex informational texts, leveled to meet all students’ needs, in order to define what makes an ideal society given the context of this time.
- In a pre-law unit focused on the Juvenile Justice System, students analyze a variety of documents from Mayor Bloomberg’s legislation that merged the Department of Juvenile Justice into the Administration for Children’s Services, the Constitution’s fifth and fourteenth amendments, to a selection of juvenile Supreme Court cases, and a documentary focused on the history of America’s juvenile system. This assignment requires students to gather and annotate text evidence, defend or refute court decisions, work collaboratively to construct a presentation that includes consideration on the influence of social media and the income of the accused on case decisions. The expected outcome of the task is that students will gain an understanding of the difference between the juvenile and adult systems of justice.
- An algebra task takes students through the process of interpreting quadratic functions from graphs and tables that are grounded in a real world scenario of how a toy company that is manufacturing a new toy maximizes its profit. The task also requires students to write responses to prompts such as explain what the value means in the problem, and determine how this is possible. Thus, students are required to not only solve the problem but to demonstrate their mathematical thinking. Additionally, this task is aligned to both the Common Core and the school’s instructional focus of embedding reading and writing across subjects.
- After an analysis of argument writing, it was determined that students needed greater clarity on writing counterclaims. Teachers implemented a strategy wherein students chunked their writing to focus singularly on each component of argument writing prior to completing the full essay. Additionally, prior to writing argument essays for their law class, students debated one of several issues regarding zoning laws and their impact on communities. Their choices included citizen’s civic responsibilities, caring for the homeless, or the impact of social issues on communities. This enabled students to establish their own position and to recognize the legitimacy in both sides. Students also researched the zoning laws in their communities.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms teaching strategies are in place to provide most students with access to curricula and opportunities to demonstrate their thinking.

### Impact

Although supports were available to engage most students in appropriately challenging tasks, not all students showed ownership of their learning by taking part in discussions and producing high level work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- After viewing a selected clip from the film *Between the Borders: American Migrant Crisis*, and a selection of visual representations of the immigrant experience, students in an English as a New Language (ENL) class engaged in a silent discussion on chart paper that required students to write reactions. Students, familiar with the process, began writing. The film and photographs addressed the needs of visual learners, the content connected to the students' lives, and prompt questions were provided in Spanish. However, full student engagement was uneven, and during check-ins with groups, although the teacher posed questions designed to encourage understanding, the teacher did not provide sufficient time for students to think before attempting to answer.
- In an algebra classroom, students viewed a video clip showing a dolphin's rise and fall in the ocean. This visual representation provided an entry point into graphing as students were tasked with translating the motions onto a graph. Most students recognized the pattern and accomplished the task, but as the principal pointed out, there was a missed opportunity for the teacher to listen to student discussions to discern reasoning or push them to articulate their thinking. Moreover, while there were ample supports for students with translated documents and scaffolded sheets, there were no extensions available for students who caught on quickly.
- Students in the United States history class engaged in studying three issues pertinent to the Progressive Era to determine whether they were social, political, or economic. Students had choice in issues ranging from working conditions, women's rights, racism, and political corruption. Guiding questions focused on the government's responsibility, how to prioritize the issue, and address its solution. Students were provided with brief descriptions of each issue, relevant terminology, and discussion protocols included accountable talk stems. The teacher circulated and asked probing questions to push students to consensus. In many groups, however, participation was dominated by one or two voices.
- In an Advanced via Individual Determination (AVID) tutorial class that was comprised of mixed grade students, students owned and facilitated their learning. They prepare for student-led discussions by recording lingering questions from their day's class work. Question topics ranged from European imperialism, finding geometric means, and the chaos Russia encountered in total war. As one student offered, "we guide [our classmates] through their confusion by asking questions." While the groups include students who may have no knowledge of the content, students support each other through questions that prompt their peers into higher-order thinking and problem solving.

## Additional Findings

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

The school administers common assessments that help to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices reflect ongoing checks for student understanding.

### Impact

Teachers refine curricula and adjust their instruction based on assessment data and students self-assess their work. This results in effective adjustments that meet the needs of all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that through curricula work, ongoing assessments, and a uniform grading policy, "We track students at risk or students who are performing at low levels so that targeted academic interventions happen immediately." Consequently, teachers use baseline assessments in order to determine what they need to reteach or adjust so that students meet their learning goals. Thus, as a direct result of analyzing student work products for strengths and areas of foci, currently, English teachers' teaching strategies are concentrating on transitions in written work, providing choice in leveled texts, and annotation strategies.
- A science teacher noted that after assessing student work, she and her department are moving away from paper laboratory reports to more hands-on work to address students' multiple learning styles. When a Regents question revealed that her students did not have a conceptual understanding of volume, a science teacher adjusted her lesson so that students designed cylinders to test the theory. Though it took more time, students gained an understanding that was reflected when retested. Similarly, a geometry teacher said that when students were having a difficult time discerning the difference between axels, she created a task using strings to make the concept visual.
- A geometry teacher used to allot time for students to correct problems answered incorrectly on tests. However, she realized that a better support would be for them to identify reasons for errors using prompts such as "I did not understand what the question was asking," or, "I read the question incorrectly. Students correct the error, justify their answer in writing, and the teacher gets a clear indication of what students understand. An adjustment one math teacher made to her practice was to ask students to reflect on their work after completing a project. One student wrote, "I was able to think outside the box and truly understand the order of operations method. By using only four numbers, I had to figure out how the order of mathematical signs affects the expression created." This provided the teacher with a window into her student's understanding.
- Most teachers check-in with students during work time to ask questions to push their thinking. More typically, teachers collect student reflections, annotations on text, and in-class writing to assess their students' understanding. In a history class where students annotated a text regarding rights and responsibilities in China, they were also required, after targeted sections of the text, to reflect, explain their understanding, and at one point make connections to other individuals, like Confucius, who became famous after his death. In this way, teachers use student writing to assess their students' thinking processes.

<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 engage in structured professional collaborations that promote school goals and allow them to consistently analyze student work.

### Impact

As a result, teachers' instructional capacity is strengthened and targeted students make ongoing academic progress.

### Supporting Evidence

- The English Language Arts team looked at student work to surface gaps in students' argument writing. Staff agreed to focus on annotation as a means for strengthening students' use of text evidence and to provide students with models of correct and incorrect methods of annotating texts to clarify the expectations for the task. Additionally, teachers agreed to offer additional practice in reading non-fiction texts and in writing short responses with citations. The ninth grade team did a gap analysis and surfaced the need to reteach transition phrases prior to administering another argument essay.
- After analysis of the results from the Living Environment Regents, the science department noticed that students had trouble understanding graphing and interpreting data. A step suggested was to create a storyboard of procedures and to return to graphing to strengthen student understanding. Additionally a targeted group of students was identified who were close to passing 'but not quite there'. The team agreed to provide strategic support with laboratory reports, and to offer additional small group tutoring.
- Teams use a student work analysis sheet that identifies the task, what the student is able to do, what the student is struggling with, and what the student needs to learn next. The last item is 'How can this affect your planning?' In the math team, for example, the next steps for each of two students were clarity in steps for solving a linear equation independently, and for the second, distinguish between two angles along a line versus all interior angles of a triangle, respectively. The math team also assesses tasks and how targeted groups of students performed. As a result, "We realized that students struggled with multiple choice questions, so now all of our 'Do Now's' address this.
- In the grade team observed, the focus was on four students who were being moved from a self-contained to a heterogeneous setting, given increases in their academic performance. Teachers engaged in a protocol for looking at student work, and noted areas of foci such as participation, self-confidence, and making the transition in the new classroom setting, while also recognizing the progress made in each student's stamina, self-awareness, attention to task, and confidence. A teacher shared that one of her students expressed pride in being in a class with his peers. Also in attendance were the school's social worker, each content area teacher, and the speech therapist. The inquiry process, as the social worker shared, helps her and the speech therapist 'see the whole picture of a student'. As a result of the team collaboration, they contribute to curricula planning and assessment choices so that the shared group of students, who are now exposed to greater rigor, get the support they need. Next steps were identified, be purposeful in grouping students to maximize their learning.

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

The school leader consistently communicates a unified set of high expectations to all staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

### Impact

Teachers hold themselves accountable for meeting high expectations and students receive clear and focused feedback to prepare them for their next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal holds high expectations for all staff by communicating her expectations including advocacy for student voice, respect for teaching and learning, pride in work, achievement, and a growth mindset. The school’s mission is to ensure that “all students graduate college and career ready with the skills and attitudes necessary for success”. Implementation of the AVID framework serves as the driver for college readiness for all students and includes components such as writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR) with guidelines for assessment and grading practices aligned to this framework. Teachers are provided with many opportunities to engage in professional learning to meet expectations around effective pedagogy that begins in the fall with workshops that outline strategies for increasing student achievement using collaborative annotation and Cornell note taking, developing organizational binders for all students, and using advanced technology in classrooms to ready students for their next learning level.
- Teachers engage in lab-site visits focused on, for example, providing feedback to students. After a visit a teacher stated, “I saw how a highly effective class looks. Assessment was fully integrated in instruction by both teachers as they communicated with students.” Teachers have also read current research on best practices focused on collaborative team teaching models, and the use of *Understanding by Design* strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- Students meet in advisory four times a week to practice college level skills necessary for success in all of their classes. The AVID curricula followed requires students to maintain learning logs, engage in seminar discussions, use close reading strategies, and practice Cornell notetaking. Though this was originally offered to students who volunteered for it, once school leaders and teachers realized its impact on students’ academic performance, it became a required course. Teachers received training in implementing four corners and Socratic seminars to strengthen student ownership of learning. Additionally, guidance counselors remain with students throughout their four years, and support students with developing academic goals that are adjusted as students reach them.
- During tutorials, students articulate stuck points encountered in the day’s coursework and work through the productive struggle with peers. Through ongoing student-generated questions such as, “How did you attempt to do this problem?” or “What do you think the meaning is?” the presenting student unpacks his or her confusion, perseveres, and all students collectively help each other to learn. Such engagement prepares students for college or career. Additionally, students spoke to getting prepared for college by being tutors for each other in geometry, and by receiving support from College Summit staff who push into advisory class so that there is needed support to navigate the college process.