



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Harlem Renaissance High School

High School M285

**22 East 128 Street
Manhattan
NY 10035**

Principal: Nadav Zeimer

**Date of review: March 4, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

Harlem Renaissance High School is a high school with 253 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 47% Black, 49% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 16% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 59.7%.

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	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Celebration	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. School leaders and staff communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness to families.

Impact

Ongoing professional learning opportunities provide staff a system of accountability as well as training to meet expectations. Families understand the progress their students are making toward meeting expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that this year he is focusing on high expectations for teaching and learning, and, at the start of the year, provided all staff with his expectations for increased higher order thinking in tasks. All tasks must include an authentic purpose grounded in a real world problem, and involve field or academic research that immersed students in analyzing varying perspectives. Culminating assignments must be driven by high level guiding and essential questions such as whether or not it is possible to argue for both sides of the death penalty effectively. Teachers engage in weekly professional learning opportunities to meet this expectation.
- The principal states that he takes a learning stance as a coach with teachers to support them in improving practices aligned to the high expectations set. For example, in his effort to embed student-centered practices across the school, he suggested the Question Formulation Technique to meet this goal and to support student readers. As one teacher noted, "This gets students to question the text." Teachers shared that this has resulted in students, particularly those with disabilities, becoming a "bigger part of their learning process."
- Parents are involved in the school community, and, the principal shared, this is reflected in the increase in the numbers of parents involved in the School Leadership Team (SLT). One parent offers Spanish-speaking students homework help, and another parent worked with student leaders to create bylaws for the student government. Parents appreciate that the school creates a film about each student outlining their academic history to "make students the center of our attention." Families noted that staff has an interest in each child's progress and communication is ongoing, as one parent stated: "The teachers try to work with our kids and really know how to relate to them. They understand what they are going through."
- Parents overwhelmingly shared their satisfaction with the school's approach to college and career readiness, and shared their student's stories. One parent noted that prior to enrolling in this school her daughter's grades were consistently poor. However, since she came to this school she had improved and was accepted into a pre-law program in Chicago. She now looks at her future differently. A parent of a twelfth grader shared that this was where her daughter got her second chance, that "something clicked" and teachers "pushed her to push herself." This resulted in her daughter demanding more of herself and she is now an outstanding student.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into task content, and opportunities for higher level student thinking in student work products.

Impact

Teaching practices do not consistently provide opportunities for many students, particularly high performing students, to engage in higher order thinking and across classrooms there is uneven participation in learning as evidenced in work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In several classrooms, start up activities meant to connect students to the lesson, took time away from students getting to work. In an English class, the goal was for students to learn how to write concluding sentences in a paragraph. The teacher reminded students of key points in the novel, provided a model paragraph, offered sentence starters, and a paragraph template. In the portion of the lesson observed, this took the whole time. As this was a class for English as A New Language Learners (ENL), the scaffolds in place offered an entry point into this final written statement. However, students who may not have needed such scaffolding waited to get started.
- In a history class, students engaged briefly in a discussion about whether they thought deportation or amnesty for immigrants was just. One student offered that she is torn, “While people have the right to remain in this country, some bring drugs.” Another that it would be “inhumane to convict people for wanting a better life.” This laid the groundwork for a student-led discussion that would provide a forum for students to challenge and build upon each other’s thinking. However, the teacher responded to all student commentary, and when several students asked a question that was difficult to hear, the teacher answered and summarized. Students were not given the opportunity to own their learning.
- In an English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, the teacher asked students to provide an overview of the prior lesson to catch up students who missed class which the students readily did. The startup activity invited students to draw a conclusion about marginalization by analyzing a photograph. Students conferred with each other, and caught on quickly, one student spoke softly, “giving equally isn’t always what people need.” The teacher repeated her statement, and asked what we need more of; a student offered “justice.” The teacher summed up the photograph’s message, and moved students into critiquing an informational article on marginalization. Students were provided with guiding questions and a model critique paragraph. The activities for the lesson were thoughtfully prepared and the content engaging, however, there was little opportunity for students to delve into a discussion that might have particular resonance in their communities.
- Math students worked in predetermined groups that mixed “emerging and capable learners” with “at least one proficient learner” to support each other. After the startup activity, the teacher called a student to the interactive white board to show his work. The teacher then left the problem solving to his students. It was their job to figure out what the student got wrong. In this classroom, students led the query, as the teacher allowed them to tinker with the problem. He urged them on saying “You’ve got this.”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers use and create assessments, rubrics and grading policies aligned with school curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Students receive ongoing feedback on their progress and achievement, and teachers adjust their curricula and instruction to meet students' needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school and its teachers closely monitor student progress toward credit accumulation and Regents pass rates in order to support all students with meeting graduation requirements. Given their difficulties in prior educational settings, students have a second chance to get their academic lives back on track. It is for this reason that the principal added effort and event categories to the on-line grading platform to recognize students' attempts at mastery, or when a life event interrupts progress. Teachers readily adjust instruction and provide additional support needed to ensure student progress. For example, a history teacher shared that in addition to the weekly progress reports that all students receive to track their progress; he reviews transcripts to assess individual student's Regents pass rates. This informs his choices in student groupings, and how to provide supplemental work for individual and small groups of students as they ready for the upcoming graduation requirement. Similarly, an ENL teacher tracks his students' scores on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) in order to group students either by reading or writing skills.
- Students receive weekly progress reports and responses on essays and projects that provide them with ongoing feedback on their achievement. Teachers share formative assessment data to determine if what they taught was what students learned, and to discuss instructional next steps. Additionally, all students have access to the online grading platform for progress updates, and teachers align their grade books to the school's newly revised grading policy.
- One way a history teacher determines what he might need to adjust in his instruction is by including the question formulation technique, a protocol students use to generate their own questions about a topic. This, he noted, serves as a benchmark assessment for what students know and "what I did not teach." He credits this process for improved student work. Another history teacher shared with colleagues that by providing her ENL students with visual aids and small group experiences, they make more targeted progress toward academic goals.
- The staff administers mock Regents exams between terms to look at students' stamina in responding to open-ended and extended prompts to determine what skills to reteach. Teachers, therefore, use the do now to provide students with practice in writing responses to document-based questions, a staple in both History Regents exams.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All curricula and academic tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, integrate the instructional shifts, and emphasize rigorous habits.

Impact

School-level decisions promote college and career readiness and higher order skills for a variety of students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, across grades and classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- In an ELA Advanced Placement unit, students were required to analyze an excerpt from Aristotle's *Politics* to determine the author's perspective, ideas and approaches, and how the rhetorical strategies employed by the writer impact the audience. Students had opportunities to engage in informational text and choose how they demonstrate what they understand by collaboratively designing a presentation to illustrate their analysis.
- A science unit on organization and patterns in life, required students to master targeted skills such as describe the process of transcriptions and translation, predict direction of diffusion and osmosis under prescribed conditions, and apply knowledge of cell biology to selected example of changes or losses in cell function. The task offers students choice in how they will present their thinking from written explanations and PowerPoints, to animated sequences or models that illustrate cellular processes.
- An ELA teacher shared that she and her department are focused on students encountering more challenging work, and after looking at her students' argument writing and use of domain specific language, understood that students enter at different levels. She adjusted her curricula to emphasize academic vocabulary. Her students are growing stronger in both discussion and writing. "We became more uniform in the way we introduce skills in writing. We created the rubric, and this uniformity leads to coherence." A physical education teacher agrees. He also incorporates reading, writing, and computations in his class to align to the school's curricula focus.
- The principal noted that while teachers have been engaged in strengthening their culminating assignments over the years, this year the school's inter-departmental lesson study groups are focused on revisiting rubric criteria to align to lesson aims that build skills needed for Common Core aligned assessments. For example, one assessment requires students to establish a position on whether or not American citizens should be required to vote, and another on the ethics of the death penalty. Students incorporate text-based evidence from at least three texts to support their claim. The ENL teacher made note that this task was in direct response to a poor showing on the Common Core ELA Regents exam. His students performed worse than on the prior exam that was more literature-based thus pointing to the need for more work with informational texts. In another assessment students debated deportation or amnesty as United States policies, and were provided with a text and a template to record their understandings. Such culminating assignments, the principal noted brought "together an arc for learning" that connects instructional goals to the specific skills of distinguishing a claim from an alternate or opposing claim, and using specific and relevant evidence to develop an argument that all students need to gain proficiency in.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers engage in structured professional collaborations that promote school goals and Common Core implementation. Teacher teams consistently analyze data and student work.

Impact

The work of teacher teams results in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for group of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Based on past professional learning with *The Transfer School Common Core Initiative*, the mathematics and ELA teams spearheaded the lesson study work with a focus on habits of mind such as “tinkering” in math. The principal noted that feedback from teachers resulted in a set of non-negotiables for all lesson study teams. Each team targets a strategy such as close reading and annotation or question formulation, provides a data display, and visits each other’s classrooms. Teams designed their own action plans. Teams’ reflections highlighted the results of the work in strengthening collaboration with colleagues, sharing best practices, producing high quality culminating assignments, and designing learning objectives and assessments to ready students for a culminating project. After one cycle was completed, one teacher shared, “While at times it was a little tense, I am really proud of the work because I felt the feedback I received was genuine, actionable, and real.” Another team member noted that the most “fruitful part of the lesson study was the debrief because of the suggestions for instructional improvements.”
- Over the past year, teacher teams focused on linking culminating tasks to formative assessments. In teams’ lesson study process they focus on activities aligned to a Common Core standard. They assign a lesson study leader, review the lesson plan and task, and visit the classroom to record low inference evidence of what students are learning. Teams then come together to look at the resulting student work, and offer feedback aligned to the selected standard. Their goal is to gain a better understanding of what meeting a standard or a skill looks like in practice. A white board outside of the principal’s office displays the inquiry teams’ most recent cycle.
- In the team meeting observed teachers discussed the annotation practice implemented across content areas by looking at three students’ work – an English Language Learner, a student with disabilities, and a general education student. They noted improvements in each student’s annotations in just two weeks into the inquiry cycle. The team chose this practice to move students to more meaningful analysis of texts, task criteria, and math problems. One teacher shared that she encourages her students to think about what they might be messaging if they were the author. This, she shared, results in students moving beyond just giving back information, and having an intimate connection with the text. To participate in the team’s effort to support the school’s goals for improved literacy and student-centered practices, a physical education teacher shared that “in my class students write about what they see, and are paired to support each other.” Teachers spoke to individual student’s progress such as a math student who got more specific with his annotations and is averaging 90 in the class, and a student who refused to read, but as a result of this tool, is now reading daily.