



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

The High School for Language and Diplomacy

High School M399

**40 Irving Place
Manhattan
NY 10003**

Principal: Sarah Hernandez

**Date of review: May 26, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Buffie Simmons**

The School Context

The High School for Language and Diplomacy is a high school with 442 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 31% Asian, 18% Black, 44% Hispanic, and 5% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 86.9%.

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	Focus	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 <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	Additional Findings	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
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Findings

School leaders ensure that teachers across grade levels engage in structured professional collaborations and the use of inquiry is emerging. A distributive leadership structure is strengthening and leadership capacity is being intentionally built in grade and content leads.

Impact

As a result, collaboration is beginning to improve instructional practices and teachers are beginning to be a part of decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Distributed leadership is developing across the school. Teacher leads articulated that they felt empowered to be included on decisions towards the development and support of their peers. For example, during the teacher meeting, teachers spoke about support from each other and having the time to work together. To better support subject-specific departments, the school has begun developing lead teachers to assist with curriculum development, lesson design, and in-class implementation of techniques.
- Teachers stated that students struggled with writing. Collaboration has begun to improve practice around this focus. Some teachers are using the Writing is Thinking through Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) model which provides students with a frame for organizing ideas for writing. Strategies are provided to whole classes and teachers are beginning to identify subgroups of targeted students. During the team meeting, a teacher explained that students are hesitate to annotate when to come in contact with large text. Another teacher stated that the gaps for their senior English Language Learners (ELLs) are growing and that they are looking for ways to curb it. As a result, teachers' collaborative team practice is in the process of incorporating next steps derived from the results of the analysis of formative assessments.
- The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations and an inquiry approach is developing across the teams. For example, the history team used the *Notice and Wonder Protocol* and each teacher had a role on the team such as facilitator or recorder. Teachers analyzed data from common assessments, looking for leverage points for further research. After scoring assessments, they analyzed the results to determine the learning gaps. Other subject specific teams are at different phases of the inquiry approach. At other departmental meetings, topics include administrative issues, socio-emotional and attendance concerns, strategies for teaching and the progress of individual students on common assessments. The consistent analysis of data and student work to improve pedagogical and student achievement varies across teams.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking for all students. Curriculum planning is beginning to provide access for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

Impact

Consequently, not all students are consistently engaged in coherent and rigorous curricula that emphasizes higher-order skills.

Supporting Evidence

- One of the school's curriculum initiatives is to build and strengthen units. Teachers use varied models of templates to plan their lessons. Some teachers use modules from *EngageNY* and others create their own. While some lessons push student thinking and provide rigorous content-based tasks, others are inconsistent in the emphasis of rigorous tasks and higher-order thinking skills. For example, a Global History lesson challenges students to determine their stance on the Columbian Exchange, formulate a final opinion using graphic organizers, and argue the opinion of their group members. However, in a Mandarin lesson plan all students were assigned identical recall tasks that did not reflect opportunities for high levels of student thinking and engagement. Across classrooms, many lessons revolved around worksheets. During the student interview, some students did not have artifacts demonstrating their work and some students stated the work is not challenging.
- After noticing the literacy struggles of incoming grade 9 students, teachers implemented the research-based Hochman Writing Method. As a result, students are writing with more clarity and including introduction, body and conclusion paragraphs with fidelity. However, planning reflects inconsistency of opportunities for diverse students to have access to the curriculum. For example, an art lesson plan indicates activity, materials, objective, developmental rationale/prior learning, standards, vocabulary and aim but did not provide opportunities for different student groups. Some lesson plans noted strategies such as providing students with vocabulary support or graphic organizers, though the strategies noted in lesson plans were not consistently specific to individual students. In addition, while teachers meet in content teams to review lessons and student work, lessons do not yet provide evidence of interdisciplinary planning in order to promote coherence across curriculum and instruction.
- Most lesson plans provide evidence of planning for alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards across content areas. However, planning for rigorous habits and higher-order skills is inconsistent in across subjects and learners. For example, in a grade 9 Living Environment class, the plan included opportunities for students to engage in research about a fetal pig dissection. Students examine organisms that are composed of tissues, organs, and systems. Students identify and explain an organ and its function to other their peers. While the lesson plans for a foreign language class included aim, learning target, learning objective, standards, procedures, essential questions and a warm up activity, specific differentiation to provide access for higher and lower performing students was ambiguous. Additionally, many lesson plans did not incorporate discussions or essential questions to evoke critical thinking, further hindering student access.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching practices are beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points for all students.

Impact

Inconsistent teaching strategies lead to uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- With new leadership in place, the school community has come together to reflect on how students learn best. The school community is in agreement that students learn best through intellectually engaging discussions that make student thinking visible. In many classrooms visited students worked in groups, though engagement varied. In a Living Environment class, students worked collaboratively in their groups with specific roles such as recorders or dissectors. Students were engaged and demonstrated high levels of participation. However, in an English Language Arts (ELA) class students analyzed character development in Macbeth through sentence activities and a small gap discussion. Some students shared with their group members or worked independently while others' heads were down.
- In a Mandarin class, the lesson was teacher-centered and teacher-directed. Students worked on a handout to complete a visa application form for the People's Republic of China. Productive struggle was eliminated since questions were in Mandarin and English. Students simply completed the form and students that progressed rapidly were encouraged to go ahead to the other parts of the application. The teacher then called on students to answer the questions. Some students struggled with the content and needed additional supports while others completed the task and waited for next steps. The lack of differentiated entry points left some students unable to gain access to the lesson. In addition, there was no opportunity to engage in discussion in order for students to demonstrate their learning.
- In a math class where there were a number of students with disabilities, the lesson was the same for all students. Strategies for differentiating and scaffolding the work were not evident. Students sat in traditional rows. Additionally, the teacher asked and answered questions with little student input. The teacher asked questions such as, "Do I have enough info to complete?" and "Do I have enough info to make that conclusion?" The teacher called on students with limited participation. As the teacher modeled the problem from the board, some students memorialized the material in their notebooks while others were off-task.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teachers create assessments, rubrics, and grading systems that are loosely aligned to the curricula. Teachers inconsistently use assessment data to provide students with feedback on their performance and to adjust curriculum and instruction as needed to improve student achievement.

Impact

Data that is collected from assessments provides limited feedback to students and is inconsistently used to adjust curricula and pedagogy, leading to missed opportunities to accelerate learning by all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are using assessments, such as Regents exams, unit exams, and quizzes, to monitor student progress. Teachers are beginning to use Looking at Student Work protocols in team meetings to discover patterns and trends across the data, ensure that the departments are calibrated on their use of rubrics, and that feedback provided to students is actionable. Some teachers use feedback designed for each task. Some of the student work collected, however, showed a “check”, “check-plus”, or 35/40 rather than actionable feedback or clear next steps.
- Teacher teams are beginning to develop rubrics across subjects and grades to make high expectations visible for all student work. However, some of the expectations around student work remain low. For example, in the samples of student work reviewed, there were final versions that had numerous academic and stylistic errors without the appropriate actionable feedback from the teacher.
- The school uses common assessments across grades and teachers examine assessment results to make changes to lessons and units. For example, when teachers assigned a writing response, they saw that students struggled with the topic. They also realized that students struggled with organization. As such, they incorporated strategies such as the Writing is Thinking protocol and are now achieving better results.
- Some teachers engage in effective ongoing checks for understanding. For example, in a Living Environment class the teacher asked specific questions, with extended wait time, before calling on specific students to assess their level of comprehension. In addition, in two social studies classes students were required to answer the aim as an exit slip in a 6-8 sentence paragraph, using evidence from the documents to support their answers. However, in several other classes ongoing assessments were inconsistent. For example, in an English class, the teacher asked students “Does everyone agree?” Only a few students answered positively. Then the teacher asked “Does anyone has anything different?” A few students indicate that they did, but instead of clarifying their understanding, the teacher continued with the lesson.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders are in the process of implementing policies centered around high expectations in order to promote staff and student learning. Teachers inconsistently communicate high expectations for all students.

Impact

As a result, there are missed opportunities to support teachers and students in achieving goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Professional learning sessions are designed to support teachers in achieving the schoolwide instructional focus to increase the level of rigor and student engagement. Sessions have included identifying rigorous habits and Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* levels.
- School leaders convey high expectations to teachers by providing actionable feedback through the observation process. The team is in the process of using student work as part of the observation process to ground expectations and teacher learning. Additionally, assistant principals model expectations. The administrative team refers to prior informal and formal observations to create a clear consistent connection in the ongoing feedback and expectations. Feedback on lesson observations shows that teachers are provided support and held accountable for meeting the goals of the schoolwide instructional focus.
- Students stated that the college process starts in the senior year. During the interview, freshman through seniors stated they wished that they had more assistance with the process, application, financial aid and essay before their terminal year. The school is working on improving the college process next year.