



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

High School for Environmental Studies

High School M400

**444 West 56th Street
Manhattan
NY 10019**

Principal: Daniel Dorogusker

**Date of review: November 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Buffie Simmons**

The School Context

High School for Environmental Studies is a high school with 1,259 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 13% Asian, 15% Black, 64% Hispanic, and 6% White students. The student body includes 8% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 89.1%.

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 <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	Focus	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	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

The school communicates high expectations to staff, students, and parents, to engender accountability for continuous student progress.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations amongst staff, students, and their families help to provide a path towards elevated student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations for staff as evidenced by the professional development opportunities and faculty conference. Additionally, teacher handbooks and orientation folder to set expectations and norm pedagogically practices. School leaders have aligned the school's instructional foci and to the Danielson Framework for Teaching to provide targeted feedback and next steps to teachers. Additionally, during the teacher team's interview, teachers stated that the administration provides professional development on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, teachers use *The Skillful Teacher* to support them in creating lesson plans that are clear with standards-aligned objectives and learning outcomes that are written as "students will", or "I can..." to indicate developing capacity rather than completion of an activity.
- The school community espoused the school goal of 93% in attendance. Flyers and documents promulgated throughout the school. The attendance has increased since 2012. Though the current attendance rate is 89%, the school leaders continue to hold staff, parents and students accountable by communicating and instilling individual ownership in creating high expectations. On teachers' Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) evaluator form, school leaders note the year to date (YTD) attendance for the teacher's class as well as the attendance on the date of the observation.
- Parents shared the many opportunities the school afford their children, such as Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) preparatory courses and tutoring. The school parents expressed their joy that the school offers over 15 Advanced Placement (AP) courses, including AP courses in all core subjects and Spanish. Parents stated that the school communicates via email, phone calls, and mail. Parents shared that the school uses Pupil Path allows parents and students to view student and school information such as student attendance records, class schedule, and grades to provide continuous feedback to support families with understanding student progress.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

The school has common assessments and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices do not reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student-self assessment.

Impact

School leaders and faculty have no clear portrait of student progress toward goals within and across grades and subjects. The lack of meaningful actionable feedback to students and ongoing checks for understanding do not allow for effective adjustments to lessons leading to student confusion.

Supporting Evidence

- Ongoing checks for understanding throughout the lessons and peer assessment practices are inconsistent across classrooms. During classroom observations, some teachers included exit slips, questioning, and walking around to assess student understanding. For example, in AP English Language Arts (ELA) class, the students used Google classroom and teacher evaluated the learning individually and for the group. However, some teachers fail to check for student understanding or ask a general question about the main ideas of the lesson or activity. There are uneven practices when it comes to assessing understanding during and after the instructional task. In another math class, though at the infancy stage, students responded to other students work by making comments on post-its and placing it on the work. The comments were "Good job" and "Good work."
- Across classrooms, varying use of teachers' feedback to students hinders their next steps. In a science classroom, the teacher wrote meaningful comments for a score of 120/150 "In order to receive the full 150 points for the assignment, make sure that you fully explain the given topic and that you include information from the resources you used during your research." Additionally, in a Spanish classroom, the teacher gave specific directions to students who expressed difficulty in conjugation. However, this practice was inconsistent where the presentation of student work was either devoid of student work or meaningful feedback including next steps. In a Global History classroom, the teacher wrote comments – "Beautiful job", "You follow directions well", or "Good job." During the interview, students shared their work comprising of ungraded work and fractions denoting how many questions the students answered correctly (such as "7/10" or "8/10"). The use of rubrics varied amongst children and there was a lack of task specificity, or work had been checked with "Great job." Meaningful comments varied as well, for example comments that were provided to a student who received a rubric score of 3 on completion of task: "This was a good start! Next time, push yourself and get 4s across the board."
- Instructional assessment practices are inconsistent and school leaders addressed this on the teachers' observations. Across classrooms, checks for student understanding were not observed steadily across classes and subjects. In a few classes, the teacher conferred with students at tables and provided feedback to the whole group for clarification or redirection. However, in other classrooms, teachers circulated as students worked, but this practice of roving check-ins did not yield adjustments to lessons, or mid-lesson interruption to share teacher observations to reinforce or redirect for keeping students on track.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school has aligned curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards with the integration of the instructional shifts. Critical thinking skills and analysis are consistently emphasized and coherently planned for all learners across grades and subjects using student work and data.

Impact

The curricular planning promotes coherence ensuring students are college and career ready. Curricula and academic tasks across grades and content areas encourage access and cognitive engagement for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Using the layered curriculum model for each unit, curricula and academic tasks builds student understanding in the content area and then allow students to apply their new knowledge and real-world situations. In a grade 10 Global History lesson plan, students were tasked to write a speech from the perspective of a loved one, friend, or enemy of the deceased individual and from the same time the person being eulogized. The intended outcome of the tombstone and eulogy project was to celebrate the life of the deceased, and to demonstrate the role the individual played socially, politically, and economically.
- Teacher teams regularly refine units of study and tasks using student work. For example, the Science, specifically Living Environment teacher team, analyzed their unit 1 and unit 2 examinations and noticed that there was a strong disconnect between what the students actually knew and student performance on examinations. Upon further analysis, the team concluded that the students are having difficulties understanding how questions were worded. The teachers decided to implement Regents questions every day, either as a Do Now or as a Turn and Talk group opportunity during the mini lesson. Students were then tasked to take the Regents questions again using the test tools of identifying important words and vocabulary, eliminating wrong answer choices, and giving an explanation for why they believe a choice was either wrong or right. The integration of the test preparation into the curriculum has caused students to relax during testing routines and to alleviate test anxieties while empowering students with the use of test taking tactics resulting in a 6% increase in mastery from June 2014 to June 2015 and more students scoring an 85 or better on the Living Environment Regents.
- Most lesson plans included differentiation for students, learning objectives, Do Now, Common Core Learning Standards, standards, vocabulary, aim, assessment, materials, essential questions, and homework. For example, in a Geometry lesson, students were task with developing a technique for indirect measurement using mirrors and similar triangles. The lesson plan specified flexible grouping for SWDs and English Language Learners (ELLs), scaffolds for struggling students and for visual, kinesthetic and auditory learners. However, intentional entry points and scaffolds for ELLs, students with disabilities or extensions for higher performing students were not seen consistently during the classroom visits.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices and strategies inconsistently provides differentiation and instructional strategies to provide appropriately challenging and rigorous learning opportunities that promote high achievement.

Impact

Across classrooms, teacher practice is beginning to engage diverse learners in challenging tasks and discussions that result in meaningful work products. There is an uneven demonstration of higher order thinking skills through student discussions hindering student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Students were afforded opportunities to engage in partnership discussions across some classrooms visited, there were uneven levels of student thinking and participation. In an English Language Arts class, students were seated in traditional rows. The teacher gathered background information to help students understand Macbeth. The teacher asked Level 1 Depth of Knowledge questions, such as “Is Macbeth a play?” “What is the Elizabethan era considered to be?” Students called out responses and one male student had his head down. Though, a discussion rubric was posted in the classroom, the teacher did not reference it and students responded to the teacher with no peer interaction.
- Student to student interaction and discussion was inconsistent across the classrooms. Students who participated in class discussions by responding to teacher-generated questions are beginning to use a discussion rubric. In a few classes, students were prompted to turn and talk but the conversation resulted in students being off track without mutual accountability to each other. In another class, the teacher pushed students to cite textual evidence and posted students' responses in the Google classroom.
- During a math lesson, in groups students worked on the same question. Students worked on making predictions and estimates based on limited data. Although some students explained their thinking, other students did not have the opportunity to share different strategies. Additionally, prompts to support students' thinking to use academic language and engage in a high level thinking discussion were limited thus preventing students' engagement in tasks that result in higher level thinking for all learners reaching their potential.

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

Distributive leadership structures help build leadership capacity. Scheduled professional collaborations allow teams of teachers to share content knowledge and instructional strategies for improving teaching and learning.

Impact

Structured team collaborations have resulted in opportunities for teachers to share progress of pedagogical practice and improvement in student progress. Additionally, leadership structures build capacity that influences student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Every teacher on the grade team has a role to create agenda; share best practices gained through inquiry and share with colleagues. Additionally, minutes are taken for each meeting and shared on Google Docs for all teams to strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers.
- By looking at student work to identify student needs, teachers learn strategies from their team members and collaborate to brainstorm ideas that would address the targeted student’s needs. For example, in the ELA and Science team, one teacher noticed that the bottom third of students in her inquiry group were having problems citing textual evidence. The teacher implemented a strategy, of using mini-debates to support students with the ability to naturally use evidence to win arguments, which was suggested by a colleague on the inquiry team. The teacher stated that as a result students’ oral skills in the class have improved in speaking tasks.
- During the teacher team interview, teachers shared that collaborative team meetings undergird professional development sessions that are spearheaded by teachers. For example, based on a fellow colleague sharing at a teacher team meeting, teachers engaged in honing their skills with the incorporation of Google classroom.
- Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning by participating on various committees, such as the teacher mentor, transition team, school survey, attendance, and professional development team. The professional development team created engagement games and blended learning opportunities to infuse in the curriculum. Additionally, teachers realized that students were not responding well to constructed response questions. During the teacher team interview, a teacher stated “In Science, students did not know how to approach the problem.” Teachers spoke to administration and incorporated spiraling questions into the daily do now lessons to help students think about the content they are studying in a sequence that begins with basic information and moves to higher levels of thinking and understanding.