



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing &  
Visual Arts**

**Middle-High School M415  
215 West 114 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10026**

**Principal: Daisy Fontanez**

**Date of review: March 18, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

## The School Context

Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing & Visual Arts is a middle-high school with 383 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 52% Black, 44% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 25% students with disabilities. Boys account for 36% of the students enrolled and girls account for 64%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.5%.

## 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>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Developing</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>
<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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits for all learners.

### Impact

Purposeful decisions regarding curricula promote instructional coherence, college and career readiness, and higher order skills for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal noted that Writing is Thinking through Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) with its focus on reading, writing, and math, has been a “blessing” for all students given the support it provides students with reading, writing, and problem solving. Additionally, although the school also implements the *Code X* curricula, the principal noted the absence of a rigorous approach to writing. This led to the decision to bring in the Teachers College Reading & Writing Project approach. Students are therefore exposed to multiple approaches to reading and writing across grades. For example, sixth graders compare and contrast various religions and forms of spirituality; high school students write argument essays about Macbeth’s downfall, or whether or not the United States should ban the future use of genetic engineering. Additionally, a history unit from 2014 was adjusted to raise task rigor; instead of students listing factors contributing to the post World War I economic expansion, students now consider whether the Great Depression was inevitable. The focus on cohesive writing tasks and reading of complex text across content areas resulted in a 27% increase of students passing the English Language Arts Regents (ELA) from last year’s to this year’s January exam.
- After analysis of eleventh and twelfth grade Regents scores, teachers recognized that students struggled with understanding content-specific vocabulary. This drove the decision to embed the Frayer Model with four learning targets in all lesson plans. In curricula reviewed, students who engage in this task use a specific graphic organizer to unpack vocabulary. They write definitions, create visual representations and sentences, and respond to a Regents question that includes the word. In lesson plans reviewed, such graphic organizers serve to support students in breaking out academic words or phrases such as “independent variable” or “constants” in science. Students also identify characteristics, examples, and non-examples. Higher-level students cite text evidence that reflects the meaning of the word.
- A unit regarding Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal includes the WITsi approach for analyzing complex texts. Lesson plans indicate that students also use a critical thinking wheel to strengthen the quality of text-based questioning. Students apply what they learned to written short responses about how the New Deal helped the economy recover from the Great Depression. The teacher noted that this process resulted in students “having the tools to engage in higher-level texts with confidence.” Similarly, in an ELA informational writing unit, sixth and seventh graders use the About-Point strategy to annotate texts related to teen activism and to create text-based questions using Bloom’s Taxonomy stems. This results in a text-based short response to ready students for a Socratic seminar.

## Area of Focus

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

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into curricula or engage students in high levels of discussion.

### Impact

There were uneven opportunities for students, including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and high performers, to show evidence of higher-order thinking through discussions or work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- In an advanced history class, after viewing a Power Point presentation, students were grouped to read and annotate a set of texts about the complex structures of Mesoamerica. Groups were connecting the evidence found in the texts to prompt questions on a handout to prepare for sharing what they learned with the class. In one group of five students, three engaged in a discussion, and referred back to the slides. One student pointed to a paragraph and read it aloud, but two members of the group said, “We used that already.” Most exchanges in groups did not involve all students’ voices, and though the teacher circulated to push student participation with questions such as “What is the reading about?” or “What does the reading tell you?” Students responded directly to the teacher and not to each other. Similarly, in an ELA class, although students had prepared questions for a circle discussion, and a student was asked to facilitate the discussion, the teacher called on students to pose questions to the group. Questions such as “What is the turning point?” yielded some student-to-student response, but when the teacher brought the discussion to literary elements such as noting the difference between a soliloquy and a monologue, students responded directly to the teacher not to each other. Although, the teacher began the lesson as a student-led discussion, the questions and process did not support this protocol.
- In a math class, the teacher drew on a previous discussion of compound interest and called on several students to define the term and its use. Students were asked to turn-and-talk about the pros and cons of its use, but many students did not engage with each other. When the class was brought together to share out, two students offered that “it is simple, you make money only on the principal. For example, if you make 10% and 5% on compound you make more money on compound.” The teacher felt all students had a “good grasp on it,” and moved to the work period. Thereby, there was a missed opportunity for all students to demonstrate their understanding.
- Eleventh grade science students worked collaboratively to follow procedures for dissecting a pig. Students figured out how to approach this by reading extensive instructions and delegating tasks to each other. Although it was clear that students were problem solving together to secure the pig for dissection, there was little evidence of preparation prior to the activity that would have moved students into their learning more quickly. Most students were actively engaged, but given the size of the groups, some were observers of the process. Students who were working on the dissections took ownership of the process, and the teacher served as a guide.

## Additional Findings

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

Across classrooms teachers use and create common assessments and rubrics, aligned to the curricula, to determine student progress toward goals.

### Impact

Teachers provide actionable feedback to students regarding their achievement and use the results of common assessment trends to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- After an in-depth analysis of last year's Quality Review and Regents data, the principal and the instructional team decided to implement six common assessments a year so that all teachers have up-to-date information on the specific skills in which students need support. For example, teachers focused on content vocabulary for a subgroup of eleventh and twelfth grade students that yielded a 25% increase on their Global History exam scores compared to the baseline. Additionally, the school uniformly uses an online assessment system, GradeCam to provide teachers with analysis of common assessment data that is used to adjust curricula to meet individual student's needs.
- After analysis of the June 2015 Algebra I Regents exam indicated that students struggled with graphing functions, teachers began this year with a series of lessons targeted to this area. When the initial lesson objective was not mastered, teachers collected data to identify common misunderstandings. This resulted in teachers creating tiered tasks by level of difficulty across the unit. Students were all required, for example, to create a table of at least four values and a graph for a linear function, however, they had a choice between problems with different levels of difficulty such as  $f(x) = 3x$ ,  $g(x) = 2x-4$  or  $h(x) = 1/4x + 2$ . The curricula adjustment the teacher made improved her practice in service of her students' learning.
- All teachers track student progress using the New Visions Student Summary tool that monitors student progress toward graduation, the online grading platform Engrade, and the GradeCam graphing system for tracking student progress by content area. These systems provide all students with access to their progress and missing work, and are an embedded practice across the school. Additionally, ongoing scholarship meetings with the principal require teachers to discuss students who have not met goals, and to determine actionable steps for supporting their progress. For example, after the second marking period, the principal noticed low pass rates in high school math and science classes. This led to one-on-one conferences with teachers to set up action plans and for them to provide actionable feedback and dedicate time for students to make up work and retake tests as suitable, and scholarship reports revealed increases in credit accumulation.
- In analyzing a common Living Environment assessment, teachers learned that while students could answer multiple-choice questions regarding the immune system, they were unable to tackle the extended response. Therefore, teachers spent two weeks re-teaching the skill, and when retested, 16% of the students improved in their extended responses. Additionally, after mock Regents results surfaced students' struggle with content vocabulary, teachers' use of the Frayer Model provided differentiated approaches to accommodate skill levels.

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all staff that is aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and teachers and school leaders offer ongoing communication to families regarding their children’s progress.

### Impact

School leaders have a system of accountability for all staff to meet the high expectations. Families receive ongoing feedback on their children’s progress toward meeting expectations relative to their path to college and career.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal provides a *Habits Update* to all staff that outlines expectations regarding classroom and assessment practices. This communication outlines evidence the principal expects to see in all classrooms, from teachers asking high-level and probing questions and opportunities for students to generate their own questions, to fostering collaborative discussions, and differentiating instruction that invites English Language Learners and students with disabilities to speak and listen to each other. In a February update, the principal offered suggestions for good lessons. The expectation is that the lesson is student-centered, questions tap higher-order thinking, and connections are made to students’ experiences. Additionally, the principal gives shout-outs where good practices are happening. The principal shared that she models what she expects, and that since becoming principal in August 2015, she has provided teachers with support in meeting her expectations. This also means that she will require teachers to take risks, “If I ask you to take a risk to get our kids to become critical writers and thinkers, I will work side by side with you. I am transparent.” She sees this as necessary for developing collaborative trust.
- *Advance* data revealed that questioning and discussion was an area of focus across the school. The principal and a consultant provide targeted professional learning that invites teachers to share best practices, to dive into the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to create clear instruction for all teachers, and to norm questioning and discussion techniques based on a video of teacher practice.
- Parents agree that clear and ongoing communications keep them informed of their children’s progress. They receive a monthly newsletter that provides information on Extended Learning Time options that provide students with opportunities to prepare for upcoming exams, to engage in all aspects of the college process, and to learn about graduation requirements. Additionally, parents are informed of the multiple performance art opportunities available for their children, such as a Tribeca Film Institute filmmaking course, and an opportunity for students to prepare portfolios of their work for college admissions with the support of an arts education organization, Young Audiences.
- A parent, who is also an educator, shared “I have never seen this level of parental participation, particularly for performance exhibitions.” Additionally, workshops are offered to introduce college and career readiness information. One parent noted that she also attended a three-part workshop focused on how to talk to children, “it was very useful.” Another parent stated that the principal has a “good plan in place” and that she feels welcome in the school. When her child was struggling, she was invited to take part in the class to learn more about what was hindering him and how to help him at home.

<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 are engaged in structured inquiry-based collaborations that promote school goals. Teams consistently analyze data and student work for students they share.

**Impact**

Professional collaborations wherein teacher teams look at student work and progress yields stronger instructional capacity and progress toward goals for students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The principal restructured the school day to ensure that subject and grade teams meet twice a week. Grade teams in the middle school engage in the inquiry process focused on writing across the curricula, in ninth and tenth grade the focus is on WITsi, and student performance on the Regents exams is the focus for grades 11 and 12. Subject and grade team leaders comprise the school’s academic task force that designed the protocol for curricula analysis and revision grounded in the *Understanding by Design* process. For example, the math team evaluated performance tasks to ensure they were aligned to Hess’ theory of rigor. Over the course of several meetings, they revised an assessment from a unit on amusement parks to include a reading passage and multiple opportunities for students to record their thinking in writing. In addition, they added requirements that students apply what they learn to new scenarios and glean from what they learned which park best accommodates both entertainment and financial need. All teachers expressed their appreciation and as one math teacher shared, this “time for our teams is sacred and this year, more focused.”
- In the social studies meeting, one teacher presented three student essays focused on either World War I or II. The purpose of the conversation was to ensure that as a department they held consistent essay scoring practices. Each teacher provided their rationale for the score they would give on each essay based on the introduction, details, examples, and transitions. This led to a shared decision to revise the student’s graphic organizer to focus on sentence structure and transitions. The presenting teacher also shared the work of his strongest tenth grader. To strengthen this already fluent writer, the teacher will focus on developing the student’s ability to analyze text. The team collectively agreed to customize graphic organizers so that they are targeted to students’ needs with an additional focus on academic vocabulary using the Frayer Model.
- A science teacher noted that when WITsi was first introduced the science team was unsure how to implement it in their content. However, they are now applying it in all lessons as a “precut tool to scaffold for our students.” This resulted in the science team agreeing to apply the paragraph template in future performance assessments, Do Nows, and exit slips. To further the school’s goal to improve student writing, a teacher noted how student writing is improving with Teachers College methodology. For example, the middle school ELA team revised their writing prompts to include open-ended questions and to adjust all units to include use of the RACE strategy in which students restate the question, answer the question fully, cite textual evidence, and explain how the evidence supports the answer.