



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**High School for Media and Communications**

**High School M463**

**549 Audubon Avenue  
Manhattan  
NY 10040**

**Principal: Juan Villar**

**Date of review: February 26, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

## The School Context

High School for Media and Communication is a high school with 429 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 14% Black, 82% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 37% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 82.6%.

## 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	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	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	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	Developing

## Area of Celebration

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

High expectations are consistently communicated to staff via the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, through training, and ongoing communication. The school communicates expectations to students and families and keeps them abreast of student progress toward college and career readiness.

### Impact

The school maintains a system of accountability toward expectations amongst staff and helps families understand student progress toward those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- Above and beyond the weekly parent engagement contact, via phone, email, or in-person meetings, staff also communicate with the home through an online grade book called *PupilPath*, the parent and student portal. Students stated that they check *PupilPath* at least once a week, if not twice. One student stated that she always checks after a big assignment. Students agreed that they support their parents in viewing the *PupilPath*. Parents stated that they are very pleased with the level of communication from the teachers and administration.
- Parents shared the strong support they receive with the college selection process through workshops, college fairs and tours, and the completion of the financial aid and school applications through the support of the guidance counselor. Parents pointed out that the tours included not just New York State schools, but private schools as well. Students agreed that the school helps to prepare them for college and career. Guidance counselors visit classes to discuss being on track for graduation, Regents, college applications, and financial aid. One student stated and others agreed, "There are meetings in the library to learn how to apply for financial aid, and it has been very helpful." Students listed the different college tours they had attended in the past and are looking forward to the upcoming ones. Students spoke about attending the career day, which occurs twice a year, where they listened to many presentations by people from different careers.
- Administration provides staff with consistent messages regarding expectations. Administration delineated school goals, action plans, and next steps in the opening day professional learning session, setting the tone throughout the year. Additionally, administration set forth the protocol for teachers to create unit plans using the *Understanding by Design (UbD)* model, performance tasks, and rubrics. Teachers submit plans to the supervisory team for feedback on rigor and access, as aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, state standards, and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.
- There is the professional learning committee (PLC), which is a professional development committee where teachers create and present professional development to their peers, conduct intervisitations, and share best practices. To monitor the implementation of these professional learning sessions, a system of follow-up includes professional learning cycles with frequent classroom observations and actionable feedback as well as coaching from the assistant principals to ensure that staff is working toward the school's achievement goals.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies are becoming aligned to the curricula, beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best, and inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and discussions are not always accessible to all students.

### Impact

As a result of uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in work products for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, high levels of student thinking and participation are not yet consistently reflected, as defined by the instructional shifts and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

### Supporting Evidence

- The staff believe that students learn best when they are “engaged in thoughtfully designed units of study and lessons that deepen critical thinking skills through the use of collaboration, scaffolded instruction, and frequent feedback using clear assessment criteria.” However, these beliefs are just beginning to be implemented across classrooms.
- In some classes the level of rigor and questions was evident while in others it was uneven. In an Advanced Placement (AP) English Literature and Composition class, students conducted a Socratic seminar, where they quoted from one text and previously studied texts to discuss symbolism and metaphors in two short stories. Students questioned each other in the inner circle. The outer circle did have tracking sheets to note their partners’ points, but no one in the outer circle took advantage of the two hot seats to join the discussion. On the other hand, in a history Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, students sat in groups with laptops preparing for an upcoming mock trial to determine whether the age of Andrew Jackson was the age of democracy. However, although students held roles in the groups as writer, collector of Internet sources, and facilitator, the level of discussion was minimal among the group members such that their thinking was not revealed. Similarly, other classes were teacher-dominated with questioning remaining at the Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) 1 and 2. In an algebra 2 class, although students sat in pairs, the teacher dominated the discussion asking DOK level 1 and 2 questions, in quick succession, with minimal time for students to think and often answering the question herself. For example, “What is a rational expression?” and “What is the denominator?” Students in turn raised their hands to answer the questions unanswered by the teacher in a Ping-Pong fashion from teacher-to-student and back to the teacher again. Students did not have the opportunity to discuss or demonstrate their thinking.
- In some classes, students were provided multiple entry points into materials, while in others it was inconsistently provided. In a dual language science class, students gathered into their groups while the teacher reviewed, mostly in Spanish, both the “do now” activity and vocabulary to provide students with information for the upcoming activity to translate tiered materials. However, the uneven pacing time and distributing materials meant the activity did not start for over 15 minutes. In a dual language history class, students sat in a circle while the teacher framed the discussion with a timeline and a student used a map to demonstrate. All students were encouraged to participate in this safe environment, but all received the same materials. In an English ICT class, the teachers found themselves at odds on a next step as one gave instructions to find text evidence while another spoke of sentence starters.

## Additional Findings

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

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and planning to ensure academic tasks emphasize rigorous and higher-order skills for all learners.

### Impact

The administration and faculty are beginning to make decisions to build curricular coherence and working to ensure tasks are challenging, to provide access to all students, to prepare students for college and career, and to engage all learners across subjects and grades to elevate student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and administration have taken an analytic approach toward determining the impact of the current curricula at the school. To that end at the beginning of this year the English as a Second Language teachers adopted *Edge*, a Common Core-aligned curriculum that addresses the needs of the English Language Learners (ELLs), which entails 37% of the student population. The English Language Arts (ELA) department has created their own curricula using the Common Core Learning Standards and *EngageNY*. However, they are currently reviewing Common Core-aligned textbooks to adopt and pilot for next year. The math, science, and social studies departments use *EngageNY*.
- Teachers have begun to implement the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) approach to unit planning. In most unit plans, the elements of *UbD* include, but are not limited to the enduring understandings, essential questions, specific content knowledge and skills, domain and academic vocabulary, performance tasks, and assessments. However, the *UbD* approach has not yet been implemented in lesson planning across the school. Additionally, teachers are incorporating reading and writing across the curriculum so that science and social studies implement similar methods to write claims and counter claims as does the English Language Arts department.
- Administration collects, reviews, and provides feedback for teachers on unit plans and their alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, through the use of Hess' *Rigor Matrix* and Webb's, *Depth of Knowledge* administration and staff collaboratively focus on assessing the rigor of the unit plans and tasks to provide students with access to tasks that engage a diversity of learners and that are culturally relevant. Teachers have also created course syllabi that are provided to students at the beginning of the course.
- The professional learning community shared collaborative work to create a curriculum that is a media and arts pathway. To that end, with a newly formed partnership with Lehman College they have collaboratively drafted a ten-year-plan to become a media and communication school, as they are working to create a curriculum and course catalogue that aligns to the college's curriculum and pathway. This work is still in development and is just beginning to drive planning across grades and subject areas for future course development.

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

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the curricula, but teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement is limited, and teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are beginning to use assessments from their curricula and to create their own. Administration and staff are working towards creating common exit exams for each subject and grade level, with the plan to have these finalized by June 2016. Additionally, there are grading policies by subject matter provided to students in course syllabi.
- Teachers use rubrics and checklists to support students in knowing next steps, but not always knowing how to improve their work. In student interviews throughout the day, some students knew how to use a rubric or checklist to support their learning and how to reflect on next steps. Although most student work receives a grade, score, or checkmark and often a congratulatory "great job," the feedback aligned to the rubric provided to students is minimal and does not usually provide actionable next steps. In a few instances, on bulletin boards, there appeared some peer feedback, yet it is not aligned to a rubric but instead mirrors the teachers' comments by providing positive praise, such as "very good", "great work", and "I liked it."
- The staff and administration have determined that the focus this year is on Danielson 3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques, 3c Engaging Students in Learning, and 3d Using Assessment in Instruction and have accordingly provided staff with multiple best practices toward these foci. However, the implementation of these practices, and checks for understanding as formative assessment during teaching, ranged across a scale of higher-order questions to teachers' answering their own questions. In an AP English Literature and Language class, the teacher checked for student understanding throughout the lesson, starting with explaining the aim and following along as students posed their own comparison and contrast questions during a Socratic seminar. Similarly in a bilingual social studies class, students answered higher-order thinking questions, and the teacher ensured that all students participated in a safe environment to explore their thinking. Yet, in an ICT history class with students working in groups, the teacher moved from table-to-table checking in on student progress toward the lesson goal, yet coaxed students into an unsustained discussion because they were working together but silently. In an algebra two class the teacher asked rapid questions, often answering them, and selected from students with raised hands, without determining if the remainder of the class's silence meant that they understood. In a history class, although the teacher dominated the questioning and tried to encourage students to add on to another student's answers or "piggy-back on the idea." the 'ping-pong' format did not provide the teacher with opportunities to assess student understanding. The exit ticket that followed was assigned after the bell rang.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

While teachers are engaged in professional collaborations to promote increased progress for students and to improve teaching capacity, yet they are only beginning to share responsibility for review and discussion of assessment data on student progress and performance.

### Impact

The inquiry process is in development across teams in order to accelerate and improve student achievement and plan for instructional modifications, as well as improve teacher practice.

### Supporting Evidence

- There are several teacher teams, including department, redesign team, and professional learning community (PLC). The school has a new partner in Lehman College, so that the redesign team can align the school's course catalog and curricula with the College's current pathways. The redesign team has begun to collaboratively draft a ten-year-plan to become a media and communication school. Currently, they are in the process of creating a curriculum and course catalogue. This impressive project is being spearheaded by teachers on the redesign team, and in concert with the administration, but is in the beginning stages.
- The PLC, which is comprised of six teacher leaders and an assistant principal, meet about twice a week, to reflect on data from teacher surveys, for example, and to determine professional learning sessions for the Monday staff meetings. The PLC has been investigating implementing intervisitation for professional learning since November, and so the PLC created a teacher survey to determine the faculty's interest level. As a result, they have had many teachers demonstrate an interest in intervisitations and to this end, the PLC is piloting an intervisitation method to work out any potential issues before sharing it with the whole staff at the next professional learning session. So, the PLC met during a teacher team meeting to share their personal areas of 'growth' with their intervisitation partner, to determine 'look fors' when visiting each other, and to set next week's intervisitation dates. They discussed the protocol for taking low-inference notes for the future pilot intervisitations.
- Teachers meet in their department teams to look at student work and Regents data. For example, the math department team meets twice a week to look at the results from a mock Regents that showed students passing at approximately 7% so they reviewed the item analysis determining that functions and polynomials are the main topics upon which to focus. However, teachers just conducted this item analysis and have yet to revise curricula to promote an increase in student achievement. Similarly, the English department analyzed the Regents data earlier this month and determined argumentative writing skills, where students analyze the evidence to support their argumentative writing, and literary analysis in English and social studies would support both subjects. Teachers determined their next step is for the English Language Arts and English as a Second Language teachers to review curricula and student work. Yet, there is no evidence at this time of revised curricula or improved student achievement. When asked to demonstrate revisions of curricula using student work or data based on inquiry, the departments did not provide evidence across grades and subjects to show growth toward student goals based upon inquiry, or that this work has since supported their professional growth. Additionally, when asked if teachers focus on a targeted group of students, they stated that they do for attendance, but do not do so for academic improvement, thus they were unable to demonstrate increased progress toward goals for groups of students at this time.