



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Middle School Q074

**61-15 Oceania Street
Queens
NY 11364**

Principal: Anthony Armstrong

**Date of review: October 27, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

The School Context

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a middle school with 1,120 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 66% Asian, 5% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 18% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 13% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 97.5%.

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	Well Developed
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	Proficient
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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teams of teachers meet regularly to systematically analyze their instructional practices and develop strategies for improving staff and student achievement. Distributive leadership structures facilitate teacher collaboration with school leaders to make critical decisions about teaching and learning across the school.

Impact

Through extensive teamwork, teachers regularly reflect on their pedagogy and play an integral role in key decisions that improve teacher capacity and student outcomes across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The school utilizes teacher leaders known as “ambassadors” from each content area, including the arts and physical education, to facilitate inquiry-based activities within weekly teacher team meetings. Ambassadors work directly with teams of teachers, framing school goals, implementing school-wide protocols and developing curricula and instructional initiatives. They collaborate with peers to implement professional learning sessions and inter-visitations, based on the needs and/or interests of staff members. The principal credits teamwork for the levels of individual teacher growth seen on *Advance* data reports and improved student achievement on the 2015 New York State English Language Arts exam.
- The school’s schedule includes common planning periods for all teachers. Tasks during these meetings include analyzing data to determine next steps and developing strategies to improve students’ proficiency in problem solving or responding to Common Core-aligned tasks across content areas. During the Quality Review, a teacher team analyzed samples of student writing at three levels of proficiency (high, medium and low) based on students’ responses to a short constructed response (SCR) performance task. They compared findings from that task with item skills analysis data from a recent I-Ready diagnostic assessment report for each child, to gain a deeper understanding of each student’s mastery level and individual needs. Using a task specific rubric, the participants discussed the characteristics of the work sample, the features that distinguish a high from a low level performance and what the teacher would need to teach/re-teach to improve on each student’s performance. A presenter, timer and recorder guided the flow of conversations and each participant wrote and shared instructional next steps, such as using a “plot pyramid” to demonstrate how “setting, conflict, climax, rising action and resolution” are used to “fully develop the plot” of “An American Childhood.”
- During both team meetings, teachers stated that shared leadership is demonstrated via school leaders’ designation of teacher leaders as ambassadors, coordinators, dean, programmer, advisors and staff developer, all of which confer responsibility for high level decision making, in collaboration with administrators. As part of weekly cabinet meetings, the ambassadors provide input in decisions about activities such as the selection and development of curriculum materials, evaluation of instructional practices, design of assessments, and delivery of professional development supports for all staff.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, all students were engaged in discussions and completed challenging tasks. While teaching practices consistently reflect multiple entry points, the deepening of learning through extensions into curricula and tasks for diverse learners was not typically evident.

Impact

Consistent application of scaffolds and multiple entry points result in students being engaged in rigorous tasks and discussions across grades and content areas. However, instructional practices illustrated missed opportunities to further extend learning for all students, via tasks that elevate their thinking and discussions and promote ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In the classrooms visited, teachers provided visual supports and scaffolds for students to be highly engaged in learning. Students were observed in small group activities, one-to-one conferencing with the teacher, or working together with a partner to respond to the task, prior to sharing with the whole class. In a grade 6 dance class, based on criteria outlined by the teacher verbally and via a SMARTboard, several groups of students choreographed their own moves for a dance that each group took turns sharing with the class. The students completed a group log to record “noticings, questions and suggestions” and used a participation rubric to give feedback to peers, after each group performed their dance. Similarly, in a grade 8 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) math class, groups of students rotated across work stations, where they used a graphic organizer and manipulatives to respond to questions on task cards that required them to convert varied sets of word problems to equations. In both cases teachers provided support, as needed, for students in each group.
- School leaders place emphasis on providing students with multiple opportunities to participate in high level discussions that allow them to express diverse points of view, justify their thinking and challenge each other’s thinking. In the classrooms visited, most teachers provided guiding questions which required students to think deeply about concepts and skills taught. However, there were limited opportunities for students to challenge each other’s thinking through high level peer-to-peer questioning during discussions across the classrooms. For example, although students engaged in a brief turn and talk in a grade 7 math class about how to apply unit rates to real life situations, during the time of observation most of the lesson involved only a few students in a teacher-student question and answer sequence that left little opportunity for other students to participate actively.
- The use of extensions of tasks to deepen student engagement in challenging work was evident in several classrooms, including a grade 8 science class where students used a jigsaw strategy to read four articles independently. After reading, the students used a note-taking graphic organizer to list details from each article, in response to the question, “How can advances in genetics have a negative or positive impact on human society?” The students shared findings with a peer and then with the whole class. The teacher followed up by posing additional questions that challenged students to develop their position on this issue, based on their own life experiences. A similar extension of tasks was not evident in other classrooms visited, including classrooms with advanced learners.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All curricula are strategically aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and illustrate integration of instructional shifts. Through horizontal and vertical planning, teachers collaborate to develop rigorous and coherently sequenced tasks for all learners.

Impact

All students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, have ready access to curricula designed to promote college and career readiness. Academic tasks provide multiple opportunities for all students to demonstrate high levels of thinking across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- All units of study reflect alignment to Common Core Standards and include topics, focus questions, texts, essential understandings, embedded assessments, target vocabulary, skills, and strategies for guided and independent practice. Each unit includes a culminating performance task and a Common Core aligned rubric for assessing levels of student mastery of content and skills taught. A unit for grade 7 math showed a plan for students to learn about debits and credits, as per the Common Core math instructional shift of “solving real world and mathematical problems involving operations of rational numbers”. The task required them to analyze multiple “situations” involving ledgers with varied starting balances and compute running balances after a series of transactions (debits and credits). The unit included a four level task-specific rubric as a measure of student proficiency on the task.
- Driven by a school-wide instructional focus on student engagement, teachers create curriculum maps and unit plans that illustrate tasks designed for both enrichment and acceleration of students across diverse ability levels, in special education, general education, gifted and talented, self-contained, and ICT classes. In addition to units of instruction for day-to-day core content classes, tasks for science acceleration, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Integration, the Living Environment Regents and a software engineering program, all combine to extend curricula offerings for students. Computer programming, embedded electronics, web design and programming, robotics and 3-D printing, are all additional areas of curriculum exploration for students. Project-based learning focused on 21st Century skills and strategies, along with arts courses, further infuse college and career readiness content for all learners across grades and subjects.
- Using the Atlas Rubicon online curriculum mapping tool, teachers create and share curricula and tasks for units of instruction that integrate curriculum themes and Common Core standards across disciplines. A review of unit plans indicated that, beginning in September, narrative writing has been a common thread for instruction across grades and content areas, including Spanish and math. For all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, unit plans identify tiered vocabulary, skills and unit goals tied to differentiated tasks, including student-selected research projects displayed on bulletin boards in rooms visited. *Discovery Education*, a web-based program for social studies and science instruction, is used to further immerse all students in rigorous content and tasks.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use formative and summative assessments, aligned with the school's curricula, to create a clear portrait of student mastery of targeted skills. Using common assessments, teachers evaluate and track students' progress and implement instructional adjustments based on identified learning needs.

Impact

Based upon assessment practices, all teachers develop an accurate picture of students' progress towards grade and content area goals. Teachers' effective use of data to provide other staff and all students with meaningful and actionable feedback results in adjustments to instruction that contribute to improved student mastery of learning goals.

Supporting Evidence

- There is a school-wide grading policy that is linked to common unit assessments, Measures of Student Learning and Regents exams. Samples of work in students' folders illustrate teachers' use of a common template designed to capture rubrics-based feedback, including next steps, as applicable to every content area. Team meeting agendas and minutes show that a data specialist facilitates item skills analysis of assessments, helping teachers gauge student progress and identify areas for enrichment and/or intervention. Given a finding that many students struggle with problems involving scientific notations and mathematical functions, teachers have revised portions of the math curricula to incorporate additional unit content, including linking math vocabulary to more performance tasks that reflect real world applications of those skills.
- The school leader presented an assessment plan, including assessment calendars by grades and subjects, demonstrating how teachers use I-Ready online assessments, common assessments and Common Core-aligned tasks to track student progress. I-Ready is used as a diagnostic assessment of student progress on performance tasks across content areas and grade levels. Teachers also embed pre-assessments, projects, end of unit tests and short constructed response (SCR) items as part of unit plans for all grades and content areas. Item skills data charts and spreadsheets with class and school level data presented by school staff, illustrate ongoing tracking of student achievement across grades. A review of a collection of anecdotal reports from teachers also indicates that all teachers complete assessment analysis logs that show growth in student performance, especially in English Language Arts.
- Using a variety of task-specific rubrics, all teachers provide students with feedback about their strengths and next steps for progress towards achieving learning goals for all grades and content areas. During the meeting with students, they all exhibited work samples to which a task-specific rubric such as a narrative writing, SCR or argumentative writing rubric was attached, highlighting the content, process and skills required for a given rating at each performance level of the applicable rubric. On one work sample, the teacher used rubric-based feedback to commend the student for "adding excellent details from the text to support the claim and counterclaim". The four point rubric attached to the work explicitly called for the work to address that criterion. Homework projects illustrated similar feedback aligned to a "Homework/Project Rubric" that also required the use of text-based evidence in response to tasks.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations for high levels of shared accountability for staff and student learning across the school. All staff members communicate and partner with families to support expectations for college and career readiness for all students.

Impact

Effective communication of and support for high expectations result in strong partnerships among staff and families and shared accountability for improving achievement by all staff and students.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal issues a weekly “TEAM74” newsletter that provides information and supports to all staff. The newsletter identifies learning targets and expectations for each week and reminds all staff of class work and homework requirements for all grades and subjects. Further, during weekly team meetings, all staff members work to frame and determine how to meet learning expectations for the year. Utilizing classroom observation data from technology-based portals such as *Advance* and Teach Boost, school leaders also work one-to-one with teachers to set expectations linked to their individual professional goals and to patterns of growth or decline in student achievement, as identified in data for all students whom they teach. Teachers reported that they all receive ongoing professional development from school-based staff and consultants, participate in “Monday Conversations” with peers and school leaders and attend citywide professional development events that help them develop expertise in meeting all instructional expectations.
- During the meeting with families, they all stated that they are regularly invited to “Coffee and Conversation” sessions where they learn about expectations for their children. Several noted that they attended a “Family Science Night” and a “Back to School Night” which offered an overview of curricula, expectations for class work and homework, and grading policies. Another noted that she attended a “High School Information Night” event that informed families about high school courses and expectations. The families also expressed appreciation for the many layers of communication which school staff members provide, via the school’s website, social media, text messages, school messenger calls, newsletters, event calendars and emails. Utilizing progress reports that are sent home and online data portals such as Datacation, Skedula, and PupilPath, all staff members partner with families in accelerating students’ progress towards high school and college readiness goals.
- During the teacher team meetings, several teachers stated that the principal sets clear expectations for teaching and learning through an explicit school-wide instructional focus on “student engagement”, and a “Theory of Action”. The staff handbook shows that the theory of action holds all teachers accountable for delivering high quality data-driven instruction, with multiple entry points and questioning and discussion techniques linked to “rigorous Common Core-aligned performance tasks that reflect student diversity and maximize student engagement”. In alignment to the theory of action and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, observation reports provide teachers with specific, timely and actionable feedback addressing the targeted elements of their practice, such as questioning and discussion practices, strategies for differentiation of learning, and ways to foster high levels of student engagement in learning.