



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

August Martin High School

High School Q400

**156-10 Baisley Boulevard
Queens
NY 11434**

Principal: Rory Parnell

**Date of review: March 15, 2016
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

The School Context

August Martin High School is a high school with 464 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 9% Asian, 75% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 22% students with disabilities. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 78.9%.

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	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	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	Focus	Proficient
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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students and offer ongoing and detailed feedback.

Impact

A system of accountability for high expectations is established such that staff understands and is able to prepare the students for the next level of their education.

Supporting Evidence

- Students have articulated their teachers have set high expectations for them by offering after-school programs and through preparing them to take the Regents exams. Students who have been enrolled in the school for several years also felt the scheduling of classes is more purposeful now and they are exposed to more rigorous meaningful classes now and “not just electives.” Students shared that “even in art class we write and study vocabulary words,” as was the case with a recent pop art and comic book project where students had to learn about pop artist Andy Warhol and comic author and artist Stan Lee. After-school programs include supports for academic interventions in math, English Language Arts, with a focus on increasing literacy skills.
- Individual Graduation Plans (IGP’s) for each student are generated to provide students and their families with a clear portrait of their academic performance, including any deficits which may exist on their transcript. This also includes all current regent exam scores, their expected date of graduation, and a color coded report card which indicates if the student is college ready, on-track, or in need of academic support (based on having failed one or two or more classes).
- Instructional expectations are communicated to staff regularly from the building principal along with anticipation for timely and appropriate implementation. A memo to all staff highlighted the urgency of the teachers’ instructional time being valuable and requiring certain immediate practices such as course syllabi being provided to all scholars, teachers greeting all scholars as they enter the classroom, and lesson expectations and agenda for the day being posted on the board with instructional outcomes. Additional instructional expectation memos state, “It is imperative that we set and maintain a culture where we set high academic expectations and we communicate these expectations clearly to our scholars.”
- A professional development calendar highlights the year overview for topics and expected outcomes through collaboration and inquiry with a variety of strategies for the staff. A narrative explanation of what participants will accomplish as a result of their participation in the professional development, is provided with each date on the calendar. Teachers felt their professional growth is valued and supported so they are able to provide collaborative structures that best prepare their students for success and life after graduation.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create rubrics, assessments, and grading policies that are aligned to the school's curricula and have assessment practices that consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Feedback is provided to students regarding their achievement throughout the instruction, although it may not define mastery for students to have deep meaning regarding their achievement. Additionally, although students receive feedback so teachers can make adjustments to the instruction, it does not clearly offer students the opportunity to be made aware of their own next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers utilize formative assessment data to provide feedback to students regarding the achievement on tasks with a score and written feedback. A review of several student work samples suggests that although the rubrics provide feedback and brief anecdotal statements suggest deficiencies on the task, it is unclear how the students are made fully aware of how to accomplish the revision or capable of moving forward towards mastery with their next task. For example, on a writing work given back to a student, the feedback states, "use a transition word or phrase to commence your conclusion." Another student work states "good work, however you are missing one of the annotation strategies. Where is ethos, pathos, and logos?" As a result, opportunities for meaningful actionable feedback are missed, thus limiting a student's chance to strategically implement next steps.
- In some classes, students are provided reflection sheets related to their turn and talk partnered work. They are required to answer what learning was positive and helped them today in addition to what learning was negative and affected their learning. Additionally, students need to self-assess their listening, speaking, and information skills. A review of another tracking form from living environment, has students grade their classroom performance on each lesson related to the main point of the lesson, supporting points, and then provide an overall grade effort for their participation, completion of work, and contribution to the learning environment. Although students feel the reflection form "is beneficial [because] it is a good way to know what you learned today," the practice is not systemically used throughout content areas.
- Teachers track students understanding of whether or not the student comprehends the Writing is Thinking with Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) skill component across contents using a tennis chart diagram. Team members from various subjects state 'yes' or 'no' for each student's skill, content, and mechanical use of 'because', 'but', and 'so' in their writing structures. Once an action plan is identified, students move on to being assessed for their incorporation of 'since', 'however', and 'therefore'. Teacher's use of the tennis charts for some students is incomplete across subject areas, thus creating gaps in the tracking for some students' progress of their acquisition of the WITsi skills.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts so that academic tasks are consistently emphasizing rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Coherency and promotion of college and career readiness skills for all students exists across grades and subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have adopted Common Core Learning Standards aligned curriculum from Engage NY for English Language Arts and math and the New Visions curriculum for science and social studies. They unpack and align the curriculum during weekly vertical meetings. Learning objectives and instructional outcomes are based on the standards and incorporate the instructional shifts to promote higher-order thinking skills. Through the weekly meetings and support structures of common planning times, teachers mostly use a common lesson planning template that specifically outlines instructional outcomes, higher order questioning, modifications, and mini-lesson components. For example, a grade 9 English Language Arts lesson plan document states modifications to the lesson will include the use of the interactive white board and read aloud to support those students who would benefit from them. An ecology lesson planning document includes modifications such as a shorter reading passage may be given and acceptance of both oral and written ideas in key words and phrases. Modifications to exit cards are also made to support the needs of all students in some classes. For example, a solving problems involving trigonometry exit ticket was modified to include bolded values, more simplistic diagram, and a breakdown of the problem into three rephrased simpler questions.
- Curriculum maps show purposeful pacing using the provided module outline from Engage NY. Teachers specifically identified the individual lessons in math and their time frame for each day of instruction rather than have an overall time frame for completion of the module. Additionally, curriculum maps in English Language Arts state specific texts for each module along with performance assessment prompts for each grade. Teachers used this information and identified the major writing standard for each task.
- Staff recognized “an absence of rigorous instruction and a need to develop in the area of curriculum.” As a result, they developed curriculum which “targets the need to provide multiple-entry points in the curricula and include opportunities for all students to engage in peer to peer discussions. Additionally, students should be engaged in challenging tasks with products and discussions reflective of higher-order thinking.” Actions taken to achieve this include administrative observations, professional development, students with disabilities renewal coach cycles, and students with disabilities weekly borough support cycles.
- An essential annotation strategies guide was generated to provide students question and prompts to support their annotation of a text. This guide was generated visually appealing to support various students’ needs and translated in Spanish to support English Language Learners. A rubric accompanies the guide for the provision of a specific grade and comment.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classroom, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best with their student work and discussions.

Impact

The instructional focus on Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* and instructional shifts is reflected in high levels of students thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The Danielson Framework for Teaching*, Common Core Learning Standards, and instructional shifts are incorporated into teacher practice throughout all content areas and grades. Specific focus has been towards student-centered instruction. During an English Language Arts class, a student shared “we discuss and share out with our peer’s everyday so we have better comprehension.” In that same lesson, one girl asked what prejudice means and her partner referred to her notes from the prior day’s lesson and explained it. A boy listening in at the same group asked for it to be repeated because he “would like to write it down first.” All small groups continued their rich discussion using accountable talk as directed by the teacher regarding prejudice and making connections to the Holocaust. In an art lesson, students collaborated on the development of a comic book story line by sharing their individually developed narratives and self-selected how they would blend or use one of the story genres. Similar collaborations for student tasks and discussions was observed in other classroom visits.
- Opportunities for students to take intellectual risks is a core belief within the pedagogy and was observed in many of the classrooms visited. An English Language Arts class provided a forum for students to share their interpretation of important information from individually assigned readings on the problem with sugar cane production. The teacher recognized students for their hard work and singled one out as the “student of the day.” During a social studies lesson, students provided evidence to support their claims of differences and similarities between the Napoleonic Wars and World War II using images. As a result, in most lessons, students felt they were challenged and able to articulate what they did well on and still need to improve, because the work is rigorous and challenging.
- Teachers are focusing some of their professional development time on Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching* component 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques. Throughout all classes, questions were phrased offering students a chance to explain their understanding and dive deeper into the content. Several examples from various classes include: a student being asked, “Why would that be important?” following a shared read aloud of a text, another student was asked the “million dollar question” of “What changed that allowed this to occur?”, while a group of students were challenged with providing supportive and contradictory evidence to defend “Who believes it is a virus that infected the patient?”

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students.

Impact

Inquiry collaborations have strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers and improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers explained how they revise curriculum through their inquiry practices which lead to improved student achievement. First they identify an area of needs for the students depending on the targeted subgroup, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners, or the bottom third of benchmark assessment results. Then specific strategies are identified for teachers to implement across contents and grades, such as the physical education department supporting the argumentative writing needs of all students through their curriculum content. Teachers feel these aligned practices promote the achievement of all students and improve their own pedagogy by filling in the gaps and moving all their students. However, the assessment rubrics are not yet uniform throughout the contents so school-wide coherency has not been established.
- An agenda for a grade 9 inquiry team meeting observed had an instructional objective to analyze Writing is Thinking with Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) tasks for a target student using the “since,” “however,” and “therefore” tennis chart. An established protocol was used including an ice breaker activity and review of both the meeting objective and tennis chart categories. Teachers discussed the needs for the student and clarified their objective, which was to look if the student used the term correctly, based on some teacher comments being tangential to the objective, i.e. use of capitalization and neatness. Additional student samples were shared which teachers acknowledged demonstrated growth with their writing in terms of control, structure, and mechanics.
- Inquiry teams stated their function is “to look at students and how they can apply the skills we are teaching them... to see if they understand content and make next steps.” All teachers agree these efforts have improved their own pedagogy by providing a more critical lens to their instruction and offering a different perspective to drive their instruction collaboratively. Additionally, it has impacted their curriculum through alignment of content, alignment of best practices, and provided a forum to reinforce the skills that match the student’s needs, especially for students with disabilities.
- A review of prior inquiry team meetings provides a list of agenda items including next steps and misconceptions to be taught. These agendas also provide research-based literature to support teachers understanding of purposeful intervention to improve both their own practices and progress for their students as a group. The staff then shared out their interpretation and success with the research recommendations.