



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Richmond Hill High School

High School Q475

**89-30 114 Street
Queens
NY 11418**

Principal: Neil Ganesh

**Date of review: April 12, 2016
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

The School Context

Richmond Hill High School is a high school with 1,980 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 33% Asian, 12% Black, 48% Hispanic, and 5% White students. The student body includes 21% English Language Learners and 16% students with disabilities. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 85.3%.

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 | 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 | 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 | 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 | Additional Findings | Well Developed |

Area of Celebration

| | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

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 detailed feedback and guidance/advisement.

Impact

A system of accountability for high expectations exists which supports teachers and prepares students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The “Are You Green?” campaign was established in this school to consistently communicate college and career readiness expectations to both students and staff with current student performance information. Data is shared privately with students and throughout the school on bulletin boards at the end of each semester. “Are you Green?” student reports inform students of their academic progress, attendance, and discipline record. On track is highlighted in green, needs improvement is yellow, and off track is yellow. The stated intention of the campaign is “to create student and staff awareness of any potential obstacle to 4-year graduation allowing for early intervention and correction.” Students, throughout classroom visitations and meetings, all confirmed they knew their color and status of where they stand regarding plans for the next step in their education. Teachers also receive professional development for additional support with the data analysis and application.
- A Theory of Action plan was developed as part of the Richmond Hill High School Renewal School Comprehensive Education Plan (RSCEP). Through reflection and use of the RSCEP, building leaders and staff believe they will improve student learning and create coherence necessary for instructional success. Additionally, communications to staff include monthly newsletters with a principal’s message, teachers’ corner, announcements, and renewal corner. The Renewal Corner shows data results and progress towards student achievement benchmarks such as 4-year graduation rate, college readiness index, Regent’s completion rate, and college and career prep course index.
- Students who pass a Regents exam in integrated algebra or English Language Arts (ELA), but do not achieve a score above the College Readiness Score [integrated Algebra=80 and ELA=75] are given a supplementary class on their schedule for support to retake the exam. Additionally, a wide variety of college credit courses and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered for all students. The school mandates any student who enrolls in an AP course, must sit for the exam. The school pays the AP exam registration fee for all students.

Area of Focus

| | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Proficient |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best including teaching strategies' which consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

The instructional shifts and Danielson *Framework for Teaching* informs instruction and creates opportunities for all learners to be engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher order thinking skills in student work products, although additional extension opportunities were not observed for the higher performing students

Supporting Evidence

- Throughout most classes, students were provided opportunities to engage in large and group discussions which allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge and further the group understanding. For example, in an algebra class, students were determining the range of mean, median, and mode for a series of values. The teacher asked them which measure of central tendency they would prefer to use to explain the average. Students shared their personal choices with support why. The teacher followed up, by asking what would happen to the measures if 3 pounds were added to each respective value. In a global Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, students were assigned a series of positions they had to defend regarding Israeli and Palestinian land ownership. Students were challenged to defend their position using the supportive text and documents, independent of their personal position. Similar opportunities for students to explain their thinking in class was evident throughout other classes, however, only some students would often dominate much of the verbal discussion in many of the classes.
- English Language Learners (ELLs) were provided supportive structures and opportunities to be engaged in their learning equally to other non-ELL students in classes. During a science lab experience, students who required support with vocabulary were provided a lesson specific vocabulary list with the word, part of speech, and definition to help support their development of an answer and explanation with their partners. In another science lesson, students who needed supports to complete the activity were provided one of two forms. The higher-performing students were directed to complete the scientific method template with space provided while students who needed additional supports were provided a similar worksheet which had clearly identified incremental questions intended to aid students in answering the questions. Prompts were provided and more explicit directions were listed, such as, "state one way the control group should be treated differently from the experimental group." Although similar structures were present in many classes, additional supports were not always present for the various readiness levels of students, including those that were more advanced and seeking additional conceptual challenges beyond the scope and sequence of the lesson.
- Grouping was apparent through most of the classes, although it was not clear to most students why they were grouped with the partners they were. In some cases, they explained, it was because they are friends with that person.

Additional Findings

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Proficient |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards, integrate the instructional shifts and make purposeful decisions with curricula and tasks which consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Curriculum planning documents are designed to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students across grades and subjects for ELL's and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Purposeful planning and focus on academic vocabulary is evident throughout most unit and lesson planning documents, including several lesson plans which identify tier 2 academic vocabulary and tier 3 content specific vocabulary. Mini-lessons are integrated into the lesson plans for a focus and discussion on key vocabulary. Word banks accompany many of the activity sheets to further expose students to the content specific vocabulary and directions suggest students are to answer their activity questions using the appropriate vocabulary.
- Real-life applications are identified on planning documents purposefully to connect instruction with college and career readiness skills. For example, an ELA lesson plan includes plans for students to select a literary device, engage in a group discussion followed by groups sharing their feedback with the whole class regarding their findings and discussion, using Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and selected poems from Langston Hughes. Additionally, a social studies planning document requires students to complete an activity as a group using several sources to prepare for a discussion. Another social studies lesson, consisted of different instructional approaches to yield a coherently presented expectation across classroom experiences. Throughout many of the visited classes, instructional alignment was evident.
- A purposeful immersion with non-fiction text is designed for students through the instructional planning process in most content areas. For example, social studies classes provide persuasive readings related to the creation of Israel on both Muslims and Jews and letters from Gandhi to understand why he sought independence. A multicultural perspectives course embedded the true history of how slaves were treated in the 1800's through the reading of *Kindred* by Octavia Butler. A science lesson provided a reading about the nature of poison ivy to support the design of an experiment to prove its evolutionary development. Additional ELA planning documents, include student's analysis of *Bangladesh Factory Collapse: Who Really Pays for our Cheap Clothes* by Anna McMullen and William Shakespeare's, *Julius Caesar*.
- A significant focus on the inclusion of Writing is Thinking through strategic inquiry (WITsi) strategies are embedded into most curriculum planning and student tasks. For example, a math task asks students to complete the logic sentences using the words (since and when) in their sentence construction. Several social studies unit plans also reference the use of Modern Language Association, (MLA) formatting when writing, in addition to the use of WITsi strategies.

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Proficient |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The use of common assessments for progress toward goals across grades and subject areas is also reflected in formative assessment practices consistently through the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Actionable feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement such that results can be used to adjust curricula and meet the needs of all learners effectively.

Supporting Evidence

- Common assessments are fully integrated into the curriculum across grades and content areas and facilitate the leadership and staff with using data to drive instruction. An awareness of students struggle with writing and reading comprehension came about from an analysis, especially from the ELA Regent's data and the use of an online data assessment program. Staff has aligned their content for cohesive instruction where they "all speak the same language, develop the same goals, and really care about student progress," according to building leadership. Specifically, each department has a point person assigned to support the dissemination and analysis of assessment results with teachers and lead discussions around areas for improvement by each unit.
- A major instructional shift for staff has been the purposeful use of a data tracker system to determine student achievement and mastery. Tracking students during instruction was observed using spreadsheets and clipboards to assess knowledge rather than simple compliance. Additionally, action plans have been developed for many students and groups of students so teachers use real time data collection to make appropriate adjustments with instruction. For example, during an ELA class, the teacher assessed the students' knowledge of the intent of a primary source author and asked "What does he want them to do?" The teacher then informed the class they "are going to be self-sufficient...and explain in more detail." All students moved forward with the task to collect information prior to sharing-out their individual findings. During another class, students facilitated a discussion and challenged one another about their ability to extrapolate information from the text. Following discussion, students reflected on their information and modified their findings to share out their expanded sentences with specific detail from the directions they received.
- A variety of checks for understanding were observed throughout all classes, including turn and talk, thumbs up and thumbs down, exit slips, and the use of teacher tracker checklists. Teachers noted, their use of checks for understanding make students think critically stating, "they can now defend their answer, not just take a fact, they explain it and compare it."
- In science, curriculum changes based on unit 3 and unit 4 benchmark assessment data were completed. Analyzed data revealed to teachers that students consistently had difficulty answering questions that included charts, graphs, and diagrams. As such, teachers began implementing activities that required analysis of charts and graphs across content areas as a part of daily instruction. Initial results on the unit 5 benchmark assessment show an increase of 62% from the prior assessment. Next steps are also identified which include further development of similar strategies and plans to revisit concepts for future planning units. Similar action plans and data analysis with the use of common assessments were completed in math.

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective leadership.

Impact

Inquiry practices have led to school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement while having teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Staff regularly presents to their colleagues information on instructional strategies and are supported in their ability to perform tasks and lead meetings to build teacher capacity with a focus on the Common Core Learning Standards. Several initiatives have been created/developed with a non-evaluative teacher center leader such as intervisitations and collegial teacher models for professional development. Focus revolves around the creation of improved lesson planning and curricula development to better the achievement of students. For example, the grade 10 unit on how authors use rhetoric and word choice to develop ideas and claims was modified and applied for rubric revisions through inquiry approaches. Additionally, instructional supports were specifically assigned for students with disabilities, the lowest third, highest third, and ELLs.
- An observation of a team of teachers engaged in inquiry practices demonstrated purposeful differentiated tasks by group members where one group dove into round three of an inquiry protocol looking at specific students and their work samples from social studies and ELA; while the other group analyzed the interim assessment using a tennis chart to identify next steps. Questions were presented for inquiry relating to observed progress with targeted students, need for further scaffolds, suggested differentiated tasks, and next steps towards moving forward. Staff sincerely discussed the ability and competencies of the students' work. Teachers reported, these meetings have helped both the students and themselves become better thinkers in all content areas. Additionally, differentiation and improvement on entry points into lessons through varying skill sets, such as sentence starters for some, has helped the achievement of their students. Student achievement has been raised through students having an increased awareness of their skills. This increase in achievement is noticeable in their writing performance tasks and benchmark assessments thus far.
- Staff noted, "we are given so much freedom and trust because we want to do what is right" for students. Several teachers also shared they support one another with the use of Google Docs, data trackers, and writing of curriculum. Specifically, one teacher stated, "we have 100% ownership in modifying [our curriculum] to meet the needs of our students." Curriculum revisions and modifications are accomplished through teachers tracking of students and data analysis of unit assessments collectively.