



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Hillcrest High School

High School Q505

**160-05 Highland Street
Queens
NY11432**

Principal: David Morrison

**Date of review: April 14, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Deborah Burnett-Worthy**

The School Context

Hillcrest High School is a high school with 3,335 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 32% Asian, 29% Black, 31% Hispanic, and 4% White students. The student body includes 13% English Language Learners and 11% students with disabilities. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.0%.

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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Celebration	Well Developed
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	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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. The Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts inform these beliefs. Instructional practices strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curriculum for all learners.

Impact

All learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and are able to demonstrate higher order thinking skills and ownership in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Pushing student thinking with student-to-student discussions was a consistently observed practice across the vast majority of classes visited. For example, students were required to discuss their personal knowledge and point of view on civil disobedience before beginning to paraphrase and analyze Thoreau's essay, *Civil Disobedience*. Students contributed thoughts on positive and negative feelings about the police, the riots associated with the Rodney King verdict, strikes by workers in several companies for higher wages and the use of Facebook to override media to address social injustices. In ten of fourteen classes, student-to-student collaboration was also evident. The inclusion of student-centered activities such as, Socratic seminar, pair/think/write/shares and student presentations, is a schoolwide practice informed by teachers' beliefs about how students learn best. Purposeful grouping to accommodate student discussions and collaborations also occurred in the vast majority of classes visited.
- In fourteen of fourteen classes, alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards was evident. Questions designed to push student thinking were the norm. For example, in a math class students were asked: "How can we create quadrilateral proofs by using the properties of quadrilaterals?" In an English Language Arts class, students were asked, "How do the Witches' interactions with Macbeth advance the plot?" In a science class, students were asked to, "Explain the Central Dogma and the relationship between [deoxyribonucleic acid] DNA, [ribonucleic acid] RNA, genes and proteins, and then demonstrate knowledge of DNA structure by drawing it." Students' answers to these questions demonstrated their clear understanding of the necessity of using evidence to support their responses, which they first presented to classmates during allotted collaboration time.
- Across classrooms, teachers strategically use scaffolds, questioning, opportunities for choice, and other teaching practices to create a variety of ways for all learners including advanced students, English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities to access the content, the learning objective, or the learning task. Scaffolds included the use of visual aids, cues, sentence stems, total physical response, graphic organizers, clear speech, and student presentations. Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) students, who were heterogeneously, paired by demonstrated mastery of a geometry skill set collaborated with their group and then presented to the class. Several students who previously struggled with the very same material demonstrated movement towards mastery and the corresponding standards.

Area of Focus

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. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or whom they are focused.

Impact

Although not evident during observations, teacher teams expressed and demonstrated in evidence that inquiry work is aiding in the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Lesson study and analysis of student work is resulting in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Content area inquiry teams meet regularly to review student work and performance data. Teachers facilitate these collaborations. After analysis of assessments, teachers provided constructive feedback on the “Feedback and Next Steps” survey they created to determine the focus of inquiry work. Staff members answered the questions: “What resonated with you today?”, “What questions do you still have?” and “What are you going to bring back to your student immediately?” Some teachers responded that they would immediately turnkey questioning techniques and the multiple ways to make them more effective with a heightened sense of urgency, and accountability for rigorous work and the impact of the word choices authors make.
- Teachers on one team spoke about their work and presented documentation from online communications about an English Language Arts team meeting. Two samples of text based written responses from a mock English Language Arts Regents exam were reviewed. The task required that students read a passage and identify the author’s central idea and use of at least one writing strategy to develop the central idea. The team then followed a protocol which included a discussion of the work, reflection from the presenting teacher, suggestions for teaching and learning, and a debrief. Both samples of student work revealed a need for re-teaching central idea, a need for purposeful student grouping, and academic intervention supports.
- Decisions made by the teachers within the inquiry structure in place at this school demonstrate the built in distributive leadership capacity. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that that affect student learning across the school. Teacher leaders on the inquiry team have decided the format of the midyear assessment, the focus for changes to the curriculum to address data-influenced student need and the focus for the support of teacher training to move teacher capacity. According to all teachers interviewed, team meetings have fostered meaningful conversations around teaching strategies, and promoted a data driven approach to planning. For example, teachers articulated the progress they have made in developing more checks for understanding during lessons.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts, rigorous habits, and to emphasize higher-order skills in curricula and academic tasks, and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact

The school's curricula provide coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students so that all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty ensure that teachers use curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards by implementing challenging tasks and texts, which are both informational and literary. Higher-order thinking questions, rigorous tasks, and consistent opportunities for student-centered discussions are contained in lesson and unit plans. Socratic seminars to articulate mastery of content were consistently found in English Language Arts unit and lesson plans. Writing tasks that require the use of critical-thinking skills and support the use of problem-solving abilities were documented in the science curriculum. Math teachers promote mastery of the skills needed for success on the Common Core Algebra Regents exams by including rigorous learning tasks that facilitate connections between standards and topics. For example, students learned how mastery of regression in the statistics unit could facilitate success in the linear functions and exponential functions unit. This focus on connections in the math curriculum condenses the program through an understanding of how the topics interrelate.
- Evidence of questions and tasks created in alignment with the *Depth of Knowledge (DOK)* Chart in mind include numerous opportunities to push student thinking. An Earth Science unit map requires students to be able to distinguish between two different types of physical weathering by analyzing a pothole formation and the relationship between sediment size and water velocity, and to predict how a stream can change shape over time by using their knowledge of erosion and deposition. These types of critical thinking tasks were found across grades and content areas.
- Teachers across grades and subjects use student work and data to plan and refine curricula and academic tasks to ensure cognitive engagement by all learners, including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and highest achieving students. The math and ICT teacher team used the New York State exam item analyses and student work to evaluate curricular gaps in math and determined key adjustments to meet the needs of all students. The addition of purposeful grouping according to varied reading levels, peer assessments, and tutoring resulted in progress towards student mastery of targeted skills for both the students with learning disabilities and the high achieving students who tutored them.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned to curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across subjects.

Impact

Routine review of assessment data and analysis of assessments result in timely curriculum revision and teacher reflection. Students and teachers receive actionable feedback regarding student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal, teachers, and students all spoke to the use of rubrics, accompanied by specific, targeted, and actionable feedback from teachers to students as an established ritual for improving student achievement across the school. Student work displayed in hallways included rubrics with identified areas of strength and areas of growth. Students spoke to how they regularly use rubrics in class and with homework assignments, and how teachers confer with them to provide next steps.
- School leaders and teachers revealed that the English Language Arts teacher team first identified issues in the alignment of the curriculum to the assessments. September's baseline assessment documented a student need for additional evidenced based analysis and closer reading of informational text. Teacher teams adjusted curricula to have mid-unit summative assessments. The teams, for each unit taught, used Socratic seminars and quick-writes as ongoing checks for understanding. The impact of this modification has led to more student-driven classrooms.
- Teachers use common end-of-unit assessments in all content areas aligned to the school's curricula and use the resulting data to track student performance. There is a monthly unit examination in math designed to gather data on the mastery of key standards. Social studies data collected from common assessments comprised of Regents exam questions and data-based questions. A focus on citing and analyzing text was a result of this work.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty effectively communicate high expectations for a successful partnership with families to strengthen college and career readiness for students. Teacher teams and staff systematically communicate high expectations to students with effective feedback and guidance.

Impact

Families collaborate with faculty members to participate in the preparation of the students for college and career readiness. All students receive effective individualized feedback and guidance from staff members to support their distinctive educational experience and preparation for the next academic level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness through the College Office Process Timeline. Starting in the first year, families are encouraged to attend training programs and other events that support progress towards college and career readiness for their children. Ninth grade family members are urged to attend the freshman orientation at which expectations are set for family members as partners and stakeholders on the path to college and opportunities for leadership programs and internships are introduced. Sophomore families are provided with opportunities to collaborate in the preparation of the student for the upcoming SAT and ACT. Tutoring and preparation is available for both parents and students. Sophomore parents are also encouraged to attend college fairs with their children the families of juniors are notified of College Board class opportunities and fee waivers for the many application and exam fees mandatory for application to college. Seniors and their parents are assisted with the management of the application process and encouraged to collaborate with the school in completing the many steps needed to complete the college application process. They are also encouraged to attend College Application Government Classroom Presentations. This esteemed school event includes developing a plan for future goals and post-secondary success.
- When asked what the school values, a parent stated, and other parents overwhelmingly agreed, “The school values learning and student welfare. They understand that home is where it starts and they encourage us to collaborate with them often.” Another parent stated that she appreciated the college guidance meetings for her daughter who is in tenth grade and liked that college meetings are tailored to the grade of the students and their parents since needs change from year to year. All parents considered themselves very much part of the college process and credited the college office, PupilPath, an online grading system, and the guidance counselors and teachers for their active involvement.
- Interviewed students unanimously agreed that the college office and PupilPath provided them with continuous and effective feedback and guidance that prepared them for the next level of education. Students also spoke of the encouragement and support they received from teachers, guidance counselors and their small learning communities to participate in Advanced Placement and college classes. ELLs and students with disabilities shared the same experience.