



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Robert F. Kennedy Community High School

High School Q670

**75-40 Parsons Boulevard
Queens
NY 11366**

Principal: Beshir Abdellatif

**Date of review: January 12, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

The School Context

Robert F. Kennedy Community High School is a high school with 719 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 34% Asian, 11% Black, 36% Hispanic, and 17% White students. The student body includes 11% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.1%.

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	Focus	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	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	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to curricula, reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best this is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Teaching strategies ensure strategic multiple entry points and, high-quality supports for all learners.

Impact

In all classrooms, student discussions and work products reflect high levels of thinking, participation and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's collective belief about how students learn best is founded on the premise that classrooms must consistently reflect students working in peer partnerships and groups. In addition, as stated by the principal, "There must be a high level of questioning and discussions to foster engagement and intellectually challenging activities informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*." This was evidenced in a grade 9 English Language Arts (ELA) Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class where students were using academic vocabulary in their discussions to identify and explain conflict from two different texts. Students in groups discussed man versus man conflicts, man versus self and man versus society and nature. Scaffolding was provided when needed with a clear focus on active participation and engagement using appropriate language, such as prediction, code switching and outcomes.
- Discussion expectations in all classes visited required students to listen actively and respectfully, respond in complete ideas, refer to evidence to support ideas, speak clearly for everyone to hear, direct responses to classmates, develop questions to improve clarity and maintain clear, concise claims with relevant evidence. In a grade 11 science class, students were comparing ionic and covalent properties and determining how the use of laboratory results explains their properties. Students worked in pairs discussing and writing, using hot plates to determine melting points. Students shared out with whole group to facilitate further discussions of findings as they called upon each other while everyone was confident in sharing ideas. As they listened, all students took notes.
- Teachers stated that they have focused on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards to establish engagement and higher order thinking skills in their lessons. Professional development and teams examining courses of study, and analyzing common departmental assessments inform instructional practices. All classroom visits showed the gradual release of responsibility for learning from the teachers to the students, and moving the pace of lessons through high-level questions and tasks to keep students alert, engaged and interested. In a grade 10 social studies class discussing the events in Europe and the influence of global competition in the 20th century, there was a gradual release of responsibility from whole group discussion to table groups and some students working independently, demonstrating their understanding and ownership of the learning target through use of graphic organizers, and students reviewed the main ideas and themes from the Renaissance to WWI using the "Give One/Get One" charting on ideas, events and people.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and teachers align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards, strategically integrate the instructional shifts and consistently utilize multiple resources to emphasize rigorous habits for all students in their learning tasks.

Impact

There is continued work on building coherence of curricula across grades and content areas and embed rigorous academic tasks for students to demonstrate higher order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers work with school leaders in reviewing the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* domains and focusing on student engagement and questioning techniques. Incorporating higher order thinking skills and essential questioning techniques are required and evident in lesson plans. Teachers use *EngageNY* lessons and State curriculum in English. All teachers use a common lesson plan template which emphasizes domain language and differentiation. Strategic planning in all unit plans in all subject areas and across grades address student deficiencies in speaking and listening skills revealed through a comprehensive needs assessment.
- Curricular alignment and design with a deeper focus on the writing process to ensure that tasks in all content areas emphasize rigorous habits to extend student thinking and maximize learning are continuous. To accomplish this, the school created a designated time for teachers to collaboratively develop lessons and units aligned with this focus. In the math department, coherence in the consistent use of academic vocabulary and an understanding of math concepts is evident in lesson planning. In addition, text-based tasks in unit plans and lessons emphasize responses to support thinking, writing standards, skills and strategies integrated within English, science and social studies. Curriculum maps reflect instructional shifts and task assessments that promote career and college readiness. Teachers engage students by creating assignments that require higher order skills across multiple sources. In a college credit, grade 12 government Integrated Co-Teaching class, the students were engaged in a peer-to-peer discussion about why Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech was important, followed by writing a response with references to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.
- A "college going" culture is evident through the school's program "*College Head Start*," a target-based program that enables highly motivated students to earn 10-15 credits per year in the 11th and 12th grades, while fulfilling their high school graduation requirements. The school has partnerships with the University at Albany, Farmingdale State College and Queens College. In these classes, students engage in dialogue and respond to each other's thoughts and ideas with college-level questions. The school is working on refining these unit maps with a lens of increasing student thinking and interest.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, assessments and rubrics utilized are aligned to the school's curricula and clearly highlight student progress toward mastery. There is varied use of ongoing checks for understanding in every lesson.

Impact

Teachers inform students of their next learning steps regarding student achievement. Checks for understanding and student self-assessment lead to effective lesson adjustment for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers adjust curriculum based on diagnostics of incoming students, teacher-developed assessments, and standardized test results from previous grades to make informed decisions about student learning needs. There is a uniform grading policy that incorporates four categories aligned to curricula used to calculate grades. Teacher teams along with school leaders create unit and lesson plans, embedded with aligned assessments and rubrics. Students often create their own rubrics. Feedback on posted work and in folders is meaningful and clear with next steps evident in teacher support through scaffolding, such as graphic organizers and word/sentence prompts for struggling learners along with students with disabilities and the English Language Learners.
- Teachers reported that targeted instruction across all subject areas is grounded in the application of rubrics for student work, and the use of on-going checks for understanding to support the development of skills and next steps to reach greater achievement. Students at the student meeting were quite aware of their progress toward graduation, had goals for careers or college and one student stated that, "Rubrics show us our strengths and weaknesses and is a good feedback process." Another student stated that teachers model how to use the rubrics to support stronger writing on informational or argumentative paragraphs. Students stated that they also journal in math, engage in peer assessments, and teachers check their work providing the next steps so they can learn from their mistakes. As a result of checking for understanding and meaningful feedback, students are achieving mastery levels.
- Students take mock Regents exams to assess needs to improve passing rates and are offered after-school and Saturday tutoring. This gives teachers the opportunity to access what is needed and adjust curricula and lessons to focus on necessary skill deficits. During classroom visits, teachers circulate taking notes through observations, conferencing and conducting student quick checks, and providing purposeful prompts, as they make on-the-spot teaching decisions and often decide to re-teach the prior assignment so that all students have a clear understanding of the content. Test Wizard, quick-writes from essential questions or four or five multiple-choice questions are used as exit tickets for further assessment to inform subsequent lesson redirection.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff convey high expectations and successfully partner with families and students to promote college and career readiness.

Impact

Partnerships with families are successful in supporting student progress toward a path for college and career and preparing students for the next level and success beyond graduation.

Supporting Evidence

- A culture of learning is manifested in mutual trust and respect, and high expectations throughout the school that is evident in the hallway displays, classrooms and offices through student work, staff and student attitudes, and collaboration. The goals set forth by the principal and the instructional teams are for deliberate and consistent expectations that strengthen and enhance the vision of the school which includes a college-bound mindset for all students.
- All students know what is expected of them to matriculate and successfully complete a degree in higher education. There are college-related activities throughout the school year, including training 12 seniors to be college interns assisting classmates with college applications, financial aid, scholarship searches and senior meetings. Advance placement courses are taught during the school day and students can earn college credits in addition to high school credits. The school believes that students who volunteer have high levels of self-esteem and academic success. Therefore, every student is required to complete 50 hours of community service in order to graduate.
- The school is openly collaborative and fosters strong family ties to build a supportive environment with high expectations. Families are welcomed as full partners in the school experience. Beginning in ninth grade and continuing to graduation, parent meetings include college workshops where they learn to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms and do research on finding the right campus fit for their children. Students from all grades lead their Parent-Teacher Night Conferences while parents are kept informed of ongoing student progress throughout the year. The School Leadership Team and Parent-Teacher Association work closely together to support the college culture of the school. The guidance department works with parents on graduation requirements and unique opportunities available for their child. Parents emphatically stated that their reason for choosing this school is the “college going” mindset and opportunities for students to accumulate advance credits. A parent stated that because of the work of teachers and the guidance counselor his child, a struggling student, has improved his grades and achieved honor roll. There is also a yearlong leadership elective for all students with specific themes, enduring understanding and essential skills and concepts.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Leadership structures provide a means for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and practice.

Impact

Teacher teamwork results in in school-wide instructional coherence, and effective, shared leadership structures that build capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- All departments have common prep time which is used for teacher teams to discuss practice with peers and make timely adjustments to the curriculum and instruction. Grade team meetings meet monthly to look at student work and discuss strategies to improve instruction implementing the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data and student work, supporting each other by providing feedback on next steps that inform instruction. This was evident during the grade 9 team meeting. Each teacher had a specific role and all voices were heard. It was discovered while looking at a student writing piece that Level 4 academic vocabulary was missing and annotation skills in citing evidence was not up to a Level 4. A discussion ensued on the implications for teaching to get to the top level. It was determined that an academic vocabulary list was needed as well as sentence starters as scaffolding. It was also decided that a model outline of top-level writing was needed.
- Lead teachers set the agenda/subject areas for Monday professional development meetings. In addition, lead teachers facilitate professional learning workshops for all staff, facilitate team meetings and work with school leaders to monitor student achievement. These lead teachers attend off- site venues for workshops and subsequently, conduct turnkey training at the school. There are mentors for new teachers and math teachers are paired by grade levels to assist with teaching, organizational and managerial protocols. There is a regular schedule of inter-visitations among teachers to observe and exchange effective practices.
- Collaboration is the driving force in the school where teams work together and share outcomes. For example, teachers stated that they consistently share practices and protocols for English language development, embedding academic language along with content area aims in most lessons. Teachers agreed that the collective efforts of teams have a direct impact on their approaches to instruction, teacher leadership and student collaborations and achievement reflecting the success of their work.