Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

# 2015-2016

**Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research**

**High School X332**

**965 Longwood Avenue**
**Bronx**
**NY 10459**

**Principal: Sharif Rucker**

**Dates of review: May 12, 2016**
**Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

# The School Context

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research is a high school with 192 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 44% Black, 51% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 28% students with disabilities. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 85.0%.

# School Quality Criteria

| **Instructional Core** | | |
|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school…* | **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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products | **Focus** | **Developing** |
| 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** | **Developing** |
| **School Culture** | | |
| *To what extent does the school…* | **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** | **Developing** |
| **Systems for Improvement** | | |
| *To what extent does the school…* | **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** | **Proficient** |

## Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development | Rating: | Proficient |
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**Findings**
All teachers are engaged in structured professional learning collaborations focused on increasing their instructional and leadership capacity and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards.

**Impact**
The effective work and voice of teacher teams results in the promotion of school goals through the improvement of teacher practice and student learning schoolwide.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The majority of teachers are engaged in structured collaborations that focus on advancing curricular academic and social needs of students. Grade leadership meetings take place twice a week as well as instructional teams that are focused on strategies stemming from the Writing Is Thinking through Strategic Inquiry initiative and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Teachers in the observed collaborative meeting and inquiry program stated that their work is supported by professional development for teachers in assessing student writing and planning instruction to address student needs, and is strengthening instructional capacity across the school.

- In one teacher team observed, teachers used a structured protocol to discuss the work of students in English Language Arts (ELA). This included analysis of responses to a prompt, "She changed" that required students to expand a sentence and cite text evidence. Teachers focused on the students' elaboration of the sentence stem and identified potential areas for support for the student, such as punctuation and grammar. They also discussed effective ways they could adjust their instruction through sentence prompts and directions to elicit more complex sentence structures from students in their writing.

- Teacher practice within the structure of collaborations has increased leadership and shaped student learning across the school. Teachers stated that receiving feedback from their peers and focusing on pushing students beyond their comfort zones helps them to make connections and improves their pedagogical skills. They also stated that they are making more purposeful decisions in their planning by using student progress data to select resources for lessons and ensure that all students get access to the curriculum.

## Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
Across classrooms, teaching practices and instructional strategies for meeting students' needs are beginning to reflect beliefs about student learning as informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Student work products and discussion reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

**Impact**
However, lessons do not fully engage all students in appropriately challenging tasks or rigorous discussions.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across the school, lessons are becoming aligned to the common belief that students learn best when they are engaged in their own questioning of the content, discussion with their peers, and use of academic language within the subject area. Teachers were observed making intentional decisions about increasing student participation using checklists or jotting student names on the board as they contributed to discussions and reducing the teacher directed part of the lesson. These emerging practices in some classrooms are beginning to yield increased discussion and inquiry by students.

- Teachers are making attempts to engage all students in higher order questions and also within lessons. For example, in a lesson on calculating the volume of a cylinder, students were prompted to work together and share the responses to, “How are the formulas for the volume of the cylinder and the circumference of a circle similar? Different?” However in these discussions, there were some content errors made by students which the teacher did not correct or address for the entire group. Students were hindered and could not accelerate accurately through this content.

- The development of Socratic seminar for discussion is beginning to extend student confidence in leading discussions about their learning. In one lesson, students led a text-based discussion using accountable talk stems such as, “I agree, that's a good point, would you like to add on?” However, students are in the initial stages of this type of discussion and still use scaffolds for taking turns. This practice is beginning to additionally influence the way teachers design lessons for student engagement and participation in rigorous discussion.

  Student work products reflect a range of short quick writes, annotated texts, or sections of readings form lessons in different subjects and completion of sentence prompts and responses to questions about observations questions made during Socratic seminars. The depth and independence of student writing is emerging across subjects yet remains primarily structured by graphic organizers and essential scaffolds.

## Additional Findings

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
School leaders and teachers are beginning to develop ways to effectively use results from common assessments to measure progress. Across classrooms, teacher practice inconsistently use checks for understanding or allow students to self-assess.

**Impact**
Emerging practices in the use of student data leads to the uneven use of results to monitor student progress or teachers' abilities to adjust instruction effectively to meet all students' learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across the school, teachers use a common grading policy to provide feedback to students about their progress and performance in each content area. The use of Skedula as an online gradebook additionally supports students in tracking how they are moving towards course and credit requirements. Some students interviewed stated that they use rubrics for everything but do not always discuss the scores they receive, or have opportunities to improve a particular task.

- School leaders use multiple sources of data to track progress by class by grade and by content area. They state goals and keep many tracking documents called "Tennis Charts" which are used in discussions with teachers about how students are progressing through standards in the particular subject area. However, the information harvested by these data sources do not always provide a clear portrait of progress for administrators or teachers about the status of achievement and performance of students to inform timely adjustments for supports or extensions of learning. For example, there is no specific benchmark of progress for students across the school that teachers or leaders are able to articulate to indicate how students are working towards learning goals.

- Across classroom, some teachers use exit slips and question prompts to check for student understanding and determine whether to reteach or move forward in a unit of study. However, in most classrooms visited there were inconsistent checks for understanding within lessons or at the conclusion of lessons. Additionally, students stated that sometimes they are confused and do not have sufficient time to get help during the lesson and so they rely on their extended learning time or their peers to support them.

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
School leaders communicate high expectations to the staff and are developing an accountability system aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* for these expectations. The school is in the process of developing more effective communication systems to convey college and career information to students and their families.

**Impact**
School leaders are beginning to create a culture of learning through a system of accountability. Students and families inconsistently access the necessary information to make decisions about their next steps for college and career.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders communicate high expectations of professionalism via the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* components and the supervisory observation feedback process to teachers. Additionally, there are professional development sessions led by the assistant principal, which teachers say are aligned to the expectations for lesson planning and teaching that they receive from the administrators.

- Feedback to families about student progress is inconsistent and does not always yield support for students in progressing towards meeting the expectations for college and career. Parents stated that the administration and teachers are supportive of their students and that they work together to help parents understand students' next steps. One parent stated that they recently found out about some of the initiatives that the school uses to prepare their children for college. School leaders stated that they are is developing strategies to invite parents to different events to engage more parents in a consistent manner and to share detailed college and career information more widely.

- The guidance counselor provides in class support to students and hosts various seminars throughout the year to ensure that they are aware of graduation requirements basic college entrance requirements and preparation for the SATs. Students in grades 11 and 12 participate in College NOW, in collaboration with City University of New York (CUNY), to receive college credit. However, students interviewed indicated that they had been in the school for one or two years and have not been provided any information about college and career preparation. Senior students did reassure the freshman and sophomore students in the group that this information would be forthcoming. There are missed opportunities for ensuring that all students understand the relationship between their work in the current grade as connected to a post-graduation academic career.

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

**Findings**
School leaders and faculty ensure that Common Core aligned curricula integrate the instructional shifts and build instructional coherence and college and career readiness. Teachers use student work and data to plan curricula and academic tasks.

**Impact**
The implementation of coherent Common Core aligned curricula promotes college and career readiness and leads to cognitive engagement for a diversity of learners.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The schools work around aligning curriculum to the Common Core expectations and standards is evidenced in lesson plans and units of study across content areas. Content topics include essential questions that are distinguishable from instructional objectives of lessons and are aimed at promoting higher order thinking and discussion by students. For example in one history unit, the central question is, “To what extent is globalization helpful to the world economy?” The lesson focused students on the topic of outsourcing as related to globalization. In an earth science class, the objective, “Understanding the Foucault pendulum, and the Coriolis Effect as evidence of the earth’s rotation” engaged students in trying to figure out how scientists discovered that the earth was actually rotating. This type of inquiry has been embedded across content area lessons and units.

- The school has developed a clear focus on student’s individual needs within lessons. A review of lesson plans revealed that teachers purposefully group students according to results on individual assessments, observations by teachers, language proficiency needs, and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals.

- Modifications are specifically articulated in lesson plan documents. For example in an 11th grade lesson, the teacher included strategies for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, such as providing differentiated text-based activities, without compromising the overall goal of the lesson. Some lessons also include additional support from the teacher or the paraprofessional for guiding students through the independent practice part of the lesson.