



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Harry S Truman High School

High School X455

**750 Baychester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10475**

Principal: Keri Alfano

**Date of review: May 12, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

Harry S Truman High School is a high school with 2,084 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 51% Black, 43% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 22% students with disabilities. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 89.1%.

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	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	Developing
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability has resulted in students understanding their progress towards college and career expectations and owning their educational experience.

Supporting Evidence

- This year the school focused on three practices intended to increase the level of high expectations, including increasing rigor in lesson aims, engaging students in discussion, and the inclusion of frequent checks for understanding. These expectations are communicated to staff regularly at department meetings, faculty conferences, professional development sessions, and in emails. Teachers communicated that the expectations are intended to support increased student ownership. According to several teachers, many of the high expectations and practices that professional development has focused on have become the shared value that holds them accountable to their students and each other. Teachers also stated they receive feedback aligned to the focused practices. A review of several observational reports referenced the school-wide assessment expectations including next steps such as “Have the students both justify their answers as well as explain” as part of the assessment.
- College preparation begins at freshman orientation when students are matched with a counselor who introduces them to the school’s expectations around college and career readiness. Students shared that they have frequent academic conferences and transcript reviews where they are fully aware of their next steps in all of their classes. Career programs at the school and internships include culinary arts and media communication, Air Force JROTC, the Business and Computer Technology program, and law office placement. One student shared how the school prepared her for an international law competition in the Netherlands where she placed second out of sixteen. Another student participated in a live media coverage of Hillary Clinton’s press conference in the Bronx. He remarked, “We had press passes and covered the event right alongside CNN!”
- Students recently received their transcripts, which include their school ranking. Their ranking was accompanied by a sheet that listed all the schools and opportunities that a student with that ranking would have. While the students shared that they have always been supported with all aspects of college preparation, from writing the college essay in junior year of high school to preparation for SAT, this process of being ranked was new. Many students stated that this was a great motivator and a wake-up call for them. One student said, “It made me realize that I am a procrastinator. I have worked on time management since then and I have seen a rise in my grades.” As a result of this advisement students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing their use of common assessments to measure student progress toward goals. Across classrooms, assessment practices are moving towards the consistent use of checking for understanding, though these do not always lead to real-time adjustments to instruction.

Impact

While the school uses and analyzes common assessments across the subjects, the resulting data does not consistently inform adjustments to curricula and instruction. In addition, inconsistent checking for understanding practices result in missed opportunities to meet student's needs.

Supporting Evidence

- English Language Arts (ELA) teachers from grade 9 through 12 analyzed argumentative essays and shared the findings with their department. Teachers determined that in addition to spelling and punctuation deficiencies, students often did not use textual evidence correctly or include a counterclaim. A department email to teachers addressing these findings suggested more time for journal and free writing, listing the criteria students needed to include in the essay and a day for teaching spelling and grammar. Teachers stated that ELA and social studies partnered for writing since they both write argumentative essays. Professional development provided to ELA and social studies teachers addressed strategies for *Writer's Workshop*, punctuation, and grammar. Although the building leaders and teachers report a practice of using assessments, it is unclear how effectively the results are used to adjust curriculum and make progress towards school goals.
- The schoolwide check for understanding practice, known as 1,2,3,4 cards, were observed across most classrooms; however, the results did not always lead to an adjustment to meet student needs. The cards allow teachers to visually check student understanding. A card with a 1 indicates that a student cannot do the task where a 4 indicates the student can teach others. During an ELA lesson, the teacher asked students if they understood how animal sacrifice was a tool for absolution of sins as it related to Roald Dahl's *Lamb to Slaughter*. Students held cards that showed an unevenness of comprehension. The teacher called on a student holding a card displaying a 4, but the student was not able to answer the question accordingly. When this student could not explain, the teacher asked for volunteers to further explain. As a result, although the practice of checking for understanding may be in place, there is a disconnect of how the feedback is used leading to missed opportunities to strengthen student learning.
- In a global history class on environmental impact on the world, students worked on a series of questions about deforestation and desertification to answer the overarching question of "How does a myriad of environmental issues affect different nations?" The teacher called on students to share their answers, although not everyone had finished. The teacher accepted one student's answer, asked if there were any questions and proceeded with the lesson by requesting that students list more examples. No adjustments to the lesson were observed. While this type of assessment elicited some answers to the questions, by not gauging understanding of the environmental concepts or how these contribute to the larger idea, there was a missed opportunity to make effect adjustments to engage, support, and challenge students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

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

Impact

As a result, there is coherence across grades and subjects and students are consistently exposed to higher-order thinking, thus promoting college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- All units of study reflect alignment to Common Core and include topics, focus questions, texts, essential understandings, embedded assessments, target vocabulary, and possible student misconceptions. Additionally, these units represent the new expectation of using close reading skills, annotation of documents, chunking of text, and sentence stems supports. This is especially evident with the interdisciplinary approach of ELA and social studies. For example, the five steps of the writing process are infused in both curriculums and are aimed at meeting the common problems and strengths in student writing. In addition, lesson plans emphasize rigorous habits. For example, a math lesson plan reflects the need for students to explain why an answer is only partially correct, hence needing to solve for all values of x .
- School leaders have adopted a new Common Core-aligned curriculum in both ELA and math. For ELA, the school adopted *Collections*. This curriculum focuses on the analysis of complex texts, the citation of textual evidence and engaging students in literary and argument essays. In math, the school uses *Big Ideas*, which is a math program that focuses on skill building and fluency. In order to meet the mathematical practices of constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasons of others, as well as modeling with mathematics, the school adopted a new program that uses an approach called *SOLVE*. This approach focuses on having students study the problem to determine what is being asked, seek possible solutions, and justify the results through explanations. These programs attend to the standards and instructional shifts and also align to the school's instructional focus of fostering student independence by engaging students in appropriately challenging material.
- Curricula and academic tasks emphasize higher-order thinking for all students. Science and social studies tasks all align to the Regents Exams. For example, in a law and government class studying trial procedures, students read primary and secondary sources and learn about the types of questions used in direct and cross examinations to answer the question "How does effective examination at a criminal trial advance an attorney's case?" In an algebra unit, students construct and compare linear, quadratic and exponential models and graph them to answer questions such as, "What does a function that increases over the entire domain look like?" In a global studies unit, students examine the period between World War I and World War II, and explore how the Treaty of Versailles and the demand for post-war reparations impacted Europe to answer the question "How should a defeated Germany be treated?"

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student participation.

Impact

While the belief that students be engaged in activities that are both cognitively challenging and accessible was observed across classrooms, in some cases instructional practices miss opportunities to promote ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school belief that activities be accessible and cognitively challenging so that student work products and conversations demonstrate understanding was observed in most of the classes visited. For example, in a law class, the teacher engaged students in direct and cross-examinations of witness. The teacher began by defining leading and clarifying questions. He tasked students with creating open-ended questions. The students took on the role of attorney and used the questions in trial proceedings.
- In an Integrated Co-Teaching Earth science lesson, students participated in a lab using radioactive decay to determine the age of a rock. The teacher reviewed the vocabulary and the scientific notation needed to engage in the lesson. Students then stacked pennies face up and shook them to several times to represent the instability of radio decay and recorded the changes on several data tables. Students shared predictions with each other and discussed the difference between relative and absolute dating. The teacher asked students to use the findings of their experiments to answer “Why is radioactive dating an efficient method for determining absolute age?” Students were able to demonstrate their understanding by explaining their findings and justifying their answers.
- In a global history class, students were observed annotating an article titled *How Hate Works* in preparation for a discussion on how groups and individuals use hate as a tool for their own purpose. Students discussed whether it is possible for hate to have a purpose or a benefit. While one student stated that hate was a negative and paralyzing emotion, another student shared out that as terrible as hatred was, it had a beneficial effect for soldiers because it allowed them to engage in war and survive. This shifted the conversation to hate as a tool for manipulation and the rise of the Nazi party. While across classrooms student discussions reflected high levels of thinking, there were a few missed opportunities to further deepen the thinking and foster student voice and conversation. Similarly, in an English class students read a literary critique on *Romeo and Juliet*. This text was being used as a mentor text for how transitions changed ideas and contributed to the flow in writing. While the text selected lent itself to discussion, the teacher focused the instruction on identifying the transitions rather than how the transitions created connections in the texts. This resulted in limited student-led conversation and limited opportunities for students to share each other’s thinking.

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. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity.

Impact

Teacher collaborations strengthen instructional practices and result in the progress of student goals. Built-in teacher leadership ensures that teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In a teacher team meeting, teachers used a protocol to look at two students, an English Language Learner and a student with an individualized educational plan, who demonstrated the common misunderstandings in these target populations. Teachers recorded student progress on a student growth checklist. Teachers identified and shared out clear progress of student goals from previously addressed targeted areas based on improvement in the student’s second essay according to the rubric. The second essay was longer, had more salient details, and was better organized. Teachers decided that their next steps were to include the use of academic vocabulary and to introduce a document-based essay as a way to strengthen these specific points. When asked how this type of work strengthened their instructional practice, teachers stated that that they are more aware of the need for clear scaffolds that allow students to be able to demonstrate their skills and understanding.
- With a tight teaching schedule, teachers wanted more opportunities to continue sharing ideas and student data. The school has developed a Google Doc-based system where teachers can share student work, data, and strategies. Teachers continue to collaborate outside of school time and through this forum they extend their teacher team meetings and work across disciplines. A review of these documents demonstrated that teachers organize their notes in a structured approach that describes what students are able to do, areas for improvement, and specific suggestions. For example, one identified outcome was to provide students with more models of essays, such as the *New York Times Book Review*, as a model for a response to literature essay.
- Teachers shared that they are always thinking about ways to improve the student’s experience and deepen their learning. One of the recommendations that was made by teachers was that the students in the media unit needed updated equipment that would familiarize them with the professional grade equipment and software needed for journalism internships. As a result of this, the media room has been upgraded with state of the art, professional equipment that includes furniture and equipment from a real newsroom that made donations to the school.
- The gym teacher shared that in order for students to find summer jobs as camp counselors, students needed to be certified as lifeguards. He proposed that this certification could be offered at the school since they have a swimming pool. The school now has a lifeguard certification program through the Red Cross.