Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The School for Classics
High School K683
370 Fountain Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11208
Principal: Janice Ross
Date of review: November 18, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Steven Chernigoff
The School Context

The School for Classics is a high school with 317 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 61% Black, 26% Hispanic, 4% White, and 8% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 37% of the students enrolled and girls account for 63%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 83.6%

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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Area of Celebration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, formal professional collaborations and make key school-wide instructional decisions within embedded distributive leadership structures.

Impact
The school’s very effective professional collaborations have strengthened all teachers’ instructional capacity to implement the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and shifts, resulting in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Embedded leadership structures enable teachers to play a key role in important decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has a structured and well-defined schedule of regular professional collaborations that promote teacher leadership. Teachers meet together during regular Monday and Tuesday afternoon professional learning time sessions, as well as during Tuesday and Thursday 4th period common planning times. Lead teachers from each department plan teacher meetings and chart inter-visitation schedules. English and social studies teacher teams adjusted their curricula to incorporate more argumentative writing and tasks requiring research to support CCLS implementation. Using a student work analysis protocol, teachers uncovered that although students were improving in writing claims, they still needed more help with writing counter-claims and therefore teachers adjusted their pedagogy to work on this skill, resulting in student improvement. In one instance, a teacher team analyzing an English language learner Special education student’s essay identified weaknesses in supporting evidence for the counterclaim cited. The team advised the student’s teacher to supply a graphic organizer when working on argumentative writing and to assist the student to chunk the essay by paragraphs.

- Teacher teams developed and promoted the Word of the Week as a school-wide instructional strategy based on analysis of student data indicating the need for greater emphasis on academic vocabulary. There is widespread evidence of all students, including high needs sub-groups, benefitting from this strategy. Students were observed utilizing the current and previous words of the week in almost all classrooms. In particular, social studies and science Regents exam scores have improved as a result.

- Based on teacher request, the principal arranged for regular collegial inter-visitations to share best practices for improving pedagogy. Each year, teachers set the lens for what to look for in each other’s classrooms, based on identification of student needs and their desire to improve student outcomes. They also change the focus of inter-visitations over the course of the school year, as different student needs surface. Teachers discuss their learning in team meetings to further expand their body of knowledge. In one inter-visitation, a teacher saw a colleague using a graphic organizer that included transition words and phrases to support Students with Disabilities and English language learners with argumentative writing. All teachers on that teacher’s team decided to infuse transition words and phrases within graphic organizers and then analyzed the students’ essays and found that students were improving in their writing skills due to this strategy.
Area of Focus

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments and a common grading policy to determine student progress toward goals and to adjust curricula and instruction.

Impact
Teacher-created and common assessments provide students and teachers with actionable feedback and next steps to accelerate student learning. Teachers utilize the assessment results to plan instruction that targets student weaknesses, improving student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence
- Student work in folders, notebooks and displayed in classrooms and hallways across all subject areas shows evidence of the consistent use of rubrics that are aligned to curricula. Teachers use these rubrics to assess student work and provide feedback on current strengths and next steps. Earth Science, Living Environment, Global History and Theater class assignments include detailed grading metrics within rubrics so that students understand what they are responsible for learning and how they are graded.

- Assigned tasks are graded using rubrics that provide feedback on strengths, weaknesses and next steps for improvement. Teacher teams discuss which rubrics will be used for classroom assessments per grade level and content-area class. A common grading policy across the school ensures that students know what is expected in each subject to move on to the next grade.

- All students take the New York City Performance Assessment baseline in English language arts and math. Teacher teams analyze results and create action plans that detail next steps for instruction and learning. Teams use a surfacing the gaps protocol to identify current student thinking and to plan instruction to improve student outcomes. In science and social studies, the school gives practice Regents exams in the fall and the spring to assess student progress toward mastering Regents curricula. Teachers then adjust the curriculum and their instruction to address areas in which groups of students and individuals need more help. This practice has resulted in improved Weighted Regents passing rates as posted in the School Quality Guide for English, Global History, and Living Environment Regents exams.
Additional Findings

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and integrate the instructional shifts to promote college and career readiness. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks for all learners.

Impact
The school’s work to align curricula creates coherence and promotes college and career readiness for all learners. Academic tasks demand higher-level thinking skills across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence
- All curricula are aligned to the CCLS and content standards. Teachers create and adjust curricula to incorporate the instructional shifts in all core subjects and in the arts. For example, social studies and science teachers include the literacy shifts across grades by having students read complex informational text, cite evidence from sources, and learn academic vocabulary. Math and English teachers use Engage NY modules to ensure coherence across grade levels.

- All teachers use a common lesson plan template, which includes CCLS standards, a learning objective, an aim, a brain shaker, an agenda and skills. This template has built coherence and a consistent method of emphasizing higher order-skills within tasks across all grades and for all learners. Teachers plan lessons and create questions to increase complexity according to Webb’s Depth of Knowledge levels.

- Curricula and lesson plans identify areas for multiple entry points and differentiation for English language learners (ELLs) and Student with Disabilities so they can access the same curriculum, and engage in high-level tasks. For example, earth science and social studies teachers provide scaffolded texts to students, translated into Spanish and Bengali, enabling ELLs and Students with Disabilities (SWDs) in the Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class to access the curriculum and engage in higher-order thinking activities. Additionally, teachers provided students with dictionaries, glossaries, visual aids, and multi-media resources such as Google Translate, resulting in improved outcomes for these students.
Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy  
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Impact
Uniform practices of reading complex, informational texts and citing evidence to support arguments lead to instructional coherence and widespread incorporation of the instructional shifts of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teaching strategies that incorporate multiple entry points lead to improved learning outcomes for all students, especially ELLs and SWDs.

Supporting Evidence
- Across classrooms, teaching practices consistently emphasize the school-wide instructional focus of vocabulary acquisition and use. Students access vocabulary through word walls, a cohesive school-wide use of word of the week, explicit vocabulary instruction, and overall attention to academic and domain-specific vocabulary. Students in a 9th grade living environment lesson identified priority vocabulary such as ozone depletion, habitat destruction, and acid rain. Students were encouraged to utilize the vocabulary in completing the assigned task. The 9th grade math teacher used the word of the week “elaborate” and expected students to be able to use it as a verb but also discussed how it could be an adjective.

- Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers integrate the literacy instructional shifts. A 9th grade English teacher addressed the instructional shifts by engaging students in a Socratic Circle on censorship and the class novel The Bluest Eye, as well as a non-fiction article, “Places I Never Meant to Be” by Judy Blame. Students cited evidence from the article to explain Blume’s position on censorship and took positions on whether censorship is ever beneficial. To supplement their reading of the novel Black Boy, students in an 11th grade English class viewed a music video by rapper Bobby Shmurda and read “An Open Letter to Bobby Shmurda,” in which a fan objected to his use of certain language that she considered self-defeating. Students then wrote an argumentative essay on whether people should use such language and cited evidence from both the letter and the video. In math classes, instruction emphasized real-world application. Students in CCLS-algebra were asked to determine which investment vehicle they preferred to have, based on interest rate and length of savings.

- Students studying seismology in earth science and learning about the effects of pollution in living environment classes used one of three versions of text. Students with stronger academic skills read more complex text with fewer scaffolds to support vocabulary and comprehension, and responded to an open-ended question, while other students were provided with a text chunked by paragraph and with specific information questions after each paragraph. In global history, teachers provided English language learners with native language texts about each famous dictator who ruled during World War II. Tasks in these classes demanded that students read, view, listen, and research a variety of sophisticated sources, such as Discovery.com, Education-Portal.com, and the Common Core Library, and discuss their learning with their classmates. Additionally, across classrooms, students were intentionally grouped in homogeneous groups for same level text work and in heterogeneous groups to provide peer support for ESL students.
Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations Rating: Well Developed

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff, provide training and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and work with students and families to help them understand those expectations.

Impact
The school’s high expectations for staff lead to improved teacher practice within the Danielson Framework reflected in successive rounds of observation data. Students and families know what is needed to be college and career ready and how to progress toward the high expectations the school sets through each grade level.

Supporting Evidence
- School leaders evidence high expectations for teacher practice through use of the Danielson Framework as a lens to inform ongoing feedback that is directed towards meeting the needs of all learners. Monday 80-minute professional learning sessions, common planning time meetings, and individual conferences are devoted to creating a shared understanding of effective teaching practices and provide training to all faculty, especially those who are rated ineffective or developing. According to the most recent Learning Environment Survey, 100% of the teachers believe that the principal places a high priority on the quality of teaching. In addition to a staff handbook detailing school expectations, teachers receive feedback by email every time they are observed and are encouraged to respond with reflections. Feedback from teachers after professional learning sessions indicates satisfaction with the content and a belief that sessions help them to improve their practice. A teacher who was rated Developing and has a Teacher Improvement Plan (TIP) is programmed to observe a highly effective partnering teacher’s class one period each day as part of his five teaching periods, in order to improve his practice, and then teaches the same lesson later in the day to his class.

- The principal meets with every teacher at the end of each marking period to review students’ grades and to discuss patterns and trends. Teachers are expected to explain student weaknesses and to specify which targeted, individualized interventions they will use to support those students in the next marking period. The principal uses this information to suggest supplementary support such as academic tutoring or counseling.

- Parents and students, including SWDs and ELLs, state that everyone at the school expects them to go to college. Ninety three percent of parents surveyed said the school had high expectations for their child and that the school provides meaningful assignments that help their child learn. Ninety two percent of students feel that teachers help them reflect on their strengths and areas in which they can improve. Every student has an adult advisor and advisory groups meet every Monday to begin the week on a positive note. The advisory program follows a curriculum to assist students with study and organizational habits based on Sean Covey’s books *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens and The 6 Most Important Decisions You’ll Ever Make*, to target college and career readiness. The school counselor and College Confident, a Community-based organization, provide college and career guidance to students throughout the day as well as conduct evening workshops for families and students in completing college and financial aid applications.