Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Clinton School for Writers and Artists

Middle School M260

425 West 33rd Street
New York
NY 10001

Principal: Jonathan Levin

Date of review: March 3, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sandra Litrico
The Clinton School is a middle school with 266 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 11% Black, 21% Hispanic, 51% White, 14% Asian and 3% Multi-Racial students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 23% of the students enrolled and girls account for 77%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 97.0%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<tr>
<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>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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**School Quality Criteria**

**School Culture**

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<th><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></th>
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<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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**Systems for Improvement**

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<th><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></th>
<th>Area of:</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>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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Findings
The school has a rigorous and clearly articulated approach to interdisciplinary curriculum, which is aligned with Common Core Learning Standards and incorporates the instructional shifts. The curriculum promotes college and career readiness skills through a focus on real world learning experiences that emphasize higher-order thinking.

Impact
All students have a range of opportunities to build skills and dig deeply into important topics within coherent curricula across grades that promotes college and career readiness. Students are engaged in challenging tasks that require them to think, reflect, and problem solve.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has developed a literacy-based curriculum, which integrates writing in a wide variety of genres and content areas balancing strong academics and the arts. The learning objective in the Warhol Pop art unit states, “Students will understand Pop art more cohesively and be able to relate the movement to their lives.” The unit task required students to design a Campbell’s soup can and a writing assignment regarding the project in accord with a project-specific rubric. Teachers use an Understanding by Design template to plan units and lessons. All curriculum maps contain essential questions, content, anchor standards, learning outcomes, and assessments. The English language arts curriculum includes articles such as “How Exercise Can Boost Young Brains?” from the New York Times and other newspapers and journals to ensure students are engaged and reading relevant material from various sources. The sixth grade English language arts unit on informational reading and writing asks students to ponder the question “Are we addicted to technology?” Students research, evaluate arguments, find the central ideas of articles in argumentative text, plan for and have a debate, and write an op-ed.

- The staff has a shared understanding of rigor and they promote the motto “Push every kid, reach every kid”. As a result teachers develop higher-level questions using the Depth of Knowledge matrix and create structures such as literature circles and Socratic seminars that promote discussion and student ownership of their learning. Teachers ensure that all tasks and projects are high level, incorporate critical thinking, multiple entry points, and extensions. This was evident in all unit and lesson plans and classroom visits. The school has developed “Hawk Habits” which are a valued part of the curriculum. These foundational set of habits, which include engagement, responsibility, and time management build college and career readiness and promote student success during and beyond middle school.

- Across grades and subjects students are engaged in curriculum tasks that support college and career readiness skills including technology, cooperative learning, analyzing, and evaluating. All curriculum units include an interdisciplinary project. For example, the social studies curriculum, engages students in case studies. The grade 8 unit entitled “Booms and Busts” studies the Roaring 20’s and the Great Depression. Tasks include exploring the role of economics in United States history, comparing and contrasting the 21st century recession to the stock market crash of 1929, and identifying causes and effects of the Great Depression. Students analyze the government’s response to the Depression and write and record a public service announcement for one of the New Deal programs.
## Area of Focus

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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<td>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</td>
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### Findings
While inquiry and its translation to school-wide practice is still growing, the majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry based professional collaborations and analysis of student work and assessment that promote the achievement of school goals.

### Impact
A strong culture of professional learning communities is beginning to taken root with increased trust in colleagues, better communication about what is happening across grades, and coherence of work across teams.

### Supporting Evidence
- Teachers meet on teams that include grade level, content, Integrated Co-Teaching common planning, and topic committees. They meet during the school day, as well as, during after school professional development time. Teachers use meeting protocols to bring all colleagues ideas to the table. They work together to analyze student work, revise curriculum and share teaching practices. However, this is still a work in progress for some teachers who previously worked independently.

- There are a majority of teachers who have piloted different initiatives, which may become school-wide practices. For example, the English language arts team is engaging in a lesson study. Groups of teachers participate in inter-visitations using the Danielson Framework for teaching as a lens for constructive peer feedback. The professional development team is focused on formative assessments and is using an inquiry approach. The sixth grade math teachers are now collaborating to ensure all teachers are using a constructivist approach and are planning rigorous lessons that engaged students in investigations that push student thinking.

- The English Language Arts team discussed the question, “What are best practices on the teaching of reading comprehension and do we implement and assess them?” As a result, the teachers revised how they were teaching reading comprehension to include the teaching of high impact reading comprehension strategies such as, making connections, questioning, inferring, and determining importance. The changes were based on assessment analysis, which demonstrated how students were struggling with reading. The teachers researched strategies they needed to develop to improve their comprehension.

- Grade and content teams discussed how to integrate the school’s Hawk Habits into curricula and add opportunities to demonstrate International Baccalaureate (IB) learner profile attributes to ensure students are engaged, responsible, and college and career ready. They brainstormed ways to link specific IB learner profile attributes to learning experiences in their courses. They identified opportunities for students to demonstrate each of their attributes and planned lessons accordingly.
Additional Findings

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
Teacher practices reflect common beliefs in students’ hands-on learning and students’ immersion in challenging real-world learning tasks and meaningful student discussions. Instructional strategies and scaffolds for students are consistent across classrooms, allowing students to access learning in a meaningful way.

Impact
Effective questioning and routines provide all students access to challenging curricula, extend their higher order thinking skills, and promote rigor and ownership of their learning. However, the development of high quality supports and extensions into the curricula to challenge high achieving students continues to be a focal area.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has a shared definition of rigor, which states “working diligently on meaningful and challenging tasks that use high-level thinking, which results in the acquisition of new understandings”. Teachers use this definition when they plan engaging and rigorous lessons that are connected to real world experiences. For example, seventh graders held a mock trial on the statement “The United States is on trial for crimes against humanity.” Students had to make claims and present supportive evidence based on data they collected after researching several sites and reading texts.

- Teaching practices reflect a common belief that students learn best when they do the “bulk of the work” and teachers facilitate their learning. This was evident in classroom visits where students took the lead in questioning and discussion and teachers supported their learning. The school uses a workshop model in classroom practice, which includes a quick and direct modeling of the teaching point, supported practice, and formative assessment. The principal stated that “The entire Clinton community values perseverance, intellectual curiosity and metacognition, which are reinforced in all of their teaching.” This was observed in the classrooms through questioning, student engagement, cooperative learning activities and student-to-student discussion.

- Students are engaged in tasks that require them to analyze primary and secondary sources and interpret maps to draw conclusions about how geography influences people. They also participate in Socratic seminars. In an eighth grade social studies lesson, students discussed “When should the United States have intervened in World War II?” Students participated in group discussions and observed other groups reflecting on their own performance and giving feedback to other groups based on a rubric. They generated their own questions taking ownership of their learning.

- Teachers create lessons with their integrated co-teaching partners using Universal Design for Learning. Teachers said that they try to anticipate where students may struggle and create scaffolds and tools to support students with disabilities and English language learners. Teachers provide visuals, models, videos, and graphic organizers and offer a variety of tools to support learning while fostering independence. Small group instruction using these scaffolds was evidenced in classroom visits.
Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, grading policies that are aligned with the schools curricula. The school consistently checks for understanding to track student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact
The schools systems to monitor progress through data analysis as well as during instruction are used regularly to guide adjustments in units and lessons to meet students learning needs. Students and teachers receive meaningful feedback from curricula aligned assessment results.

Supporting Evidence
- The school strongly believes that formative assessments are a powerful tool for strengthening student performance. As a result, teachers do not wait until the end of the unit to assess learning and to make corrections. Teachers use exit slips, misconception checks, student conferences, and self and peer assessments to guide their work.

- Teachers assess the lowest third of their students using the Qualitative Reading Inventory. This assessment allows teachers to match students with appropriate books and texts.

- In the sixth grade math class a comprehensive baseline assessment was administered during the first week of school. The assessment revealed gaps in students’ skills and led to making adjustments in the curriculum.

- The school includes three “Hawk Habits” that are explicitly supported, taught, and assessed: engagement, responsibility, and time management. “Hawk Habits” are all recorded on Jupiter, an online grading system. Teachers also record their subject grades and each student and parent has a login to track outcomes. This data is also used by teachers during teacher team meetings to discuss what students are struggling with in multiple classes and how best to support them.

- Teachers use rubrics so that there is a clear indicator of where a student’s mastery lies. In performance assessments, students receive feedback on their draft so that they can make adjustments. During peer feedback, students work directly with the rubric as they evaluate fellow students work and make suggestions for improvements.
Findings
The school leader has effectively partnered with staff, parents, and students to create a system of supports, high learning expectations, and a culture of mutual accountability for those expectations.

Impact
Teachers and administrators have a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear and effective feedback to ensure that all students are independent thinkers who are prepared for college and career. There are also high expectations regarding professionalism, planning curriculum and instruction.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has effective structures and systems in place to ensure that staff consistently communicates high expectations and engage parents in their child’s learning. These include Constant Contact, Jupiter Grades, School Messenger, and grade level meetings. During curriculum night each teacher gives an overview of their curriculum and how the work increases college and career readiness. The parents receive additional updates about new units and projects during the year. Parents are invited to school performances and student project displays such as Asia Museum and Inspirational Voices among others. The school also distributes information on social media including cell phone etiquette.

- The principal writes weekly “Letter from Levin” emails to all parents focusing on important issues facing students or their families and includes suggestions on how parents can best support their children at home. The principal also sets clear expectations for teaching and learning based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching as well as on research of best practices. He shares these expectations with his staff at meetings and through newsletters to staff. The use of formative assessments and questioning techniques has been messaged and monitored through classroom observations and feedback to teachers.

- The school has multiple mechanisms to recognize students who are among their highest achievers and students who have shown great improvements. Students are also considered for induction into the National Honor Society. Parents stated, “The principal shares a vision of hope for all children and sets high expectations.”

- As an International Baccalaureate candidate school, teachers are preparing students for the eleventh grade 4,000-word extended essay on a self-selected topic. As part of this process, the school planned an extended essay as a new requirement for the eighth grade to promote college and career readiness skills. This 1000-word essay requires students to conduct research with secondary sources and work with an advisor to write the paper.

- The school offers extracurricular activities that academically challenge their students. Students write articles and publish the Clinton Post school newspaper, and the Clinton Soup, a literary magazine. They participate on the debate team and in computer club.