Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Gramercy Arts High School
High school 02M374
40 Irving Pl.
Manhattan
NY 10003

Principal: Susan Dicicco

Dates of Review:
January 12, 2017 - January 13, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Gramercy Arts High School serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</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>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Area of Celebration, Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding, Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding, Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding, Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding, Proficient</td>
</tr>
<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>Additional Finding, Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding, Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by a theory of action. Structures are in place so that all students are known well by at least one adult who helps personalize supports.

Impact

Student-voice involvement has resulted in the formation of clubs and organizations in service of student need as well as an addition to the school’s performing arts focus. Grade teams meet to discuss individual students and create individualized action plans to support those students.

Supporting Evidence

- Students have an active voice and role in the school culture’s development. Through the student government, they have led the formation and maintenance of a variety of clubs that help ensure that the school’s diverse student body is supported. Some examples of the school’s clubs and organizations are, The Gay-Straight Alliance, Meditation and Mind Relaxation, World Affairs, Art History, Dance, Fashion, and weekly book clubs. Additionally, students run a weekly newsletter where all articles are written, edited, printed, and all operational and distribution tasks are managed by students. The student government also introduced the Grammery Grammies, a new major event this year. This event is aligned to the school’s performing arts mission and in support of students’ successes, was another student-led initiative. One parent reported, “The school fosters a very welcoming atmosphere.” Another parent added and all present agreed, “The school does a great job. My child is very happy here. Nobody judge’s. My daughter literally loves being here!”

- Student requests for a beneficial peer-mediation program resulted in a training process that began in September 2015 and culminated in the school’s peer-mediation program launch in the spring 2017 semester. This program has continued and strengthened into this school year with up to five students identified as peer-mediators for each class period. Review of completed peer-mediation contracts reveal a process involving both parties’ agreement to seven rules of peer mediation, consensus building around the initial conflict, possible solutions, as well as an action plan for steps both parties agree to take to ensure the conflict will not escalate. Monthly data around student behavior not aligned with the school’s expectations, organized by each month, reveals a decrease in incidents from the previous to current school year. Additionally, the school’s data reveal a downward trend in the total number of incidents for the entire school year.

- Grade teams provide strong academic and social-emotional support for students through kid-talk sessions. At these meetings, grade team members discuss the students in their respective target groups. Grade teams use a protocol to discuss students’ academic progress, behavior, social-emotional needs, and action plans for students in need of extra support. Analysis of grade team session agendas and notes reveal conversations around issues of students’ lack of focus, academic progress, and behaviors that detract from learning for individual and groups of students. Some examples of growth strategies are developing relationships, the development and implementation of community building activities such as small- and large-group trips, and directly connecting students with the school’s guidance staff for counseling. One student reported and all present agreed, “Everyone feels comfortable here. I have always felt welcome. The teachers always know when you’re going through something and they seem to always do something about it.”
Findings

Teaching practices are beginning to reflect a set of beliefs that students learn best through a variety of strategies to help ensure that students explain their answers and challenge one another in discussions. Student discussions inconsistently reflected high levels of student participation.

Impact

Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts. However, students have limited opportunities to engage in appropriately challenging tasks, take ownership of learning, or demonstrate higher order thinking still in work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, there was evidence of teaching practices that reflected the articulated belief that students learn best when encouraged to explain their answers. In a social studies lesson on the American reconstruction period, students were analyzing the different plans that arose from President Lincoln and subsequently, President Johnson. In a grade eleven English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were asked to consider how different schools of philosophy could arrive at different conclusions as to the meaning of the same work of literature. Student responses were not considered completely offered unless and until their responses were explained. However, the additional articulated belief that students learn best when engaged in active discussions and conversation was inconsistent across classrooms. In a different grade eleven ELA class, the teacher facilitated students’ sharing of their responses to a question asking “How has texting affected romance?” Students were deprived the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with peers as all student comments were elicited by and directed toward the teacher. Other examples of limited opportunities for student-to-student discussion occurred when a geometry teacher asked students to consider what is represented in a floor plan and when another teacher asked students to volunteer different words that are pronounced differently in Italian and English.

- Across classrooms, students were seated in groups. However, this student seating arrangement lacked effectiveness as students were not assigned to tasks that required strategic, cooperative work. For example, in a social studies class, students were seated in groups and were asked to work in pairs. However, while some students worked in pairs, other students either worked individually or in groups consisting of more than two students. Another example involved students seated in groups of either six or four students in an ELA class. When asked to work cooperatively on parsing a text, the group size made it possible for students to not be engaged while their classmates completed the task.

- Students were asked challenging questions that required high levels of thinking in an ELA class where they were asked to consider the value of having different schools of analytical thought. In a drama class, students were evaluating their self-written and performed dramatic portrayals of personal struggles as guided by the following categories: acting, set design, script, and topic choice. However, there were a variety of classes in which students were asked questions that did not require high levels of thought. For example, a social studies teacher asked if the differences between Lincoln’s and Jefferson’s plans for Reconstruction after the Civil War were big. Student responses did not allow learners exhibit high-levels of student thinking or take ownership of their learning. In another social studies class, the overarching question, “What issues existed in the Treaty of Versailles?” for the class was a low-level question to which a list of items would have been a sufficient answer.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<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 State Standards, integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Curricula are coherent and promote college and career readiness. Additionally, curricula emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects so that all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, are supported.

Supporting Evidence

- Review of curriculum maps revealed evidence of alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and New York State (NYS) content standards where applicable as well as integration of the instructional shifts. A Common Core geometry lesson plan details how students are to use the skill of dilation in the real-world application of determining which pieces of furniture can fit into a fixed-size college dormitory room. A Common Core algebra unit includes a project in which students are to verify the relationship between two variables, make a scatter plot with these two variables, and identify which variables are independent or dependent. Students are then to detail, in narrative form, how they would use this data, cited from either the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), or Major League Baseball (MLB) publicly shared player statistics, to make decisions about which players to highlight. If students are not swayed by the data, they can discuss this as well and speak to what patterns are revealed by this data. Assisting students in this is their deepened understanding through the use of multiple perspectives and application of concepts in real-world situations.

- Review of lesson and unit plans revealed evidence of the embedding of the instructional shifts around reading and writing. To deepen understanding, plans revealed that students have access to a variety of lessons that include equal amounts of non-fiction and fiction. An ELA lesson plan details how students are to annotate an essay about the feminist school of literary theory and cite textual evidence from that source in their discussion as to how multiple literary theories can help reveal different perspectives on a single work of literature. A global studies lesson plan includes a task involving students reading and annotating a selection about major criticisms of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. Students were then to answer a variety of questions and support those answers with textual evidence from the selection.

- Curricular documents provided evidence of emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all students, including students with disabilities. An ELA lesson plan includes modifications specific to identified students with disabilities that would prepare them for the Socratic seminar activity in which all students would participate. A geometry lesson plan lists the different strategies, each connected to specific students that would serve as access points for students into single goal for the lesson. A living environment lesson plan indicates that a modified vocabulary list would be available for specifically identified students while other students would receive a leveled graphic organizer in order to support them in reacting the lesson’s goals. Other examples include differentiated materials and differentiated student groupings based on reading or math scores.
### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and checklists aligned with the school’s curricula. School leaders and teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

Teachers provide students with actionable feedback that students use to improve their work. Student assessment data for all Regents exams, in addition to reading level and math assessments, is used to track student progress and determine student programming.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are using rubrics across classrooms to rate personal, analytic, and argumentative essays. Teachers are also issuing rubrics and checklists to students while introducing new tasks and assignments so that they can be used by students in their work toward completing assignments. One student reported on how checklists have helped him when he said, “My teacher gave us a checklist and we all had to use it to make sure we included all the required parts of the essay.” Another student added that checklists are helpful along with rubrics because checklists are “like a step-down from the rubric to make sure we get the best grade when the rubric is used to grade us.” Additionally, teachers are giving actionable feedback to students. For example, at the close of a research paper in which the student is proposing a test of students’ ability to think creatively and independently, the teacher asked a student to consider how the study can be adjusted to account for the power of creative through in problem solving. Other examples of feedback ask to students to link evidence back to the thesis by explaining its significance, advise them to not add new controversial topics to a conclusion paragraph, and on an essay assignment in which students were required to research and quote statistics in an examination of the topic as to whether or not technology has made people smarter than before they had technology, “If the statistic is flawed, can you posit a theory why these groups are not worth comparing?”

- School administrators have planned for the current school year using incoming ninth grade students’ NYS ELA scores. Soon after the school year began, a reading assessment was administered that provided the teacher teams with a common assessment, across grades, along with interim assessments that allow for tracking of students reading level growth. Data from these assessments has informed the roster of students in honors ELA classes as well as leveled reading lists within classrooms. Additionally, this data is used to form leveled groups within classes.

- School administrators’ have contracted for the use of a math assessment that they administer across grades. Data from these assessments has been used, in addition to incoming ninth grade students’ NYS math exam score data, to strengthen students’ programming into math class during their freshmen year. This data is used to determine which students would benefit from a two year algebra sequence and which would thrive in a one year sequence. Additionally, data from these assessments is used to form leveled student groups in the school’s math classes.

- Teachers launched an assessment initiative at the start of this school year that has resulted in teachers of ELA, social studies, and sciencedesigning and administering common, department-wide mid-term and final semester exams. The resulting data will be used to track students’ progress and inform curricular and instructional adjustments.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to staff through ongoing feedback and professional learning aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school provides ongoing information to families regarding student progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact

Ongoing communication by school leaders found in feedback from observations as well as embedded within teaching and learning-focused professional development (PD) make high expectations clear. The school communicates the learning opportunities for families and uses an online gradebook system for families to understand student progress towards meeting standards.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the standards for professionalism and high quality instruction. One example of this feedback are advice to a teacher on the value of asking students to explain their interpretation of angles and to discuss how understanding of angles is applicable in real life situations. Another example of this feedback advises to use Webb’s Depth of Knowledge. In addition, teachers receive a faculty handbook that covers a wide variety of expectations ranging from day to day professional conduct, student safety, grading and academic policies, as well as lesson planning guidelines, classroom environment, and the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

- On June 28, 2016, school leadership met with the faculty to share results of the comprehensive data analysis process in which it had engaged and the instructional expectations that arose from this analysis. Teacher observation data, along with disaggregated student results data from all content area NYS Regents exams, were analyzed in this instructional goal-setting process. In addition to sharing the resulting expectations and the data that served as their foundation with all teachers, school leadership administered a teacher survey. Results from this survey informed further adjustments to these expectations once the 2016-2017 school year began. Among the high expectations shared were a menu of professional learning communities (PLC) from which all teachers would choose at least one to join, pedagogical focus areas to be covered in PD such as the design and use of assessments, providing effective feedback, and the implementation of writing strategies that support students’ critical thinking.

- School leaders and staff communicate expectations to students and their families through regular communications via phone and email as well as a comprehensive handbook. This handbook includes expectations as to students’ daily attendance, academic and personal behaviors, as well as grading policies and resources for academic supports. Information as to college application and financial aid workshops, school-based parent meetings as well as information sessions and celebrations of student successes hosted by the school’s partnering organizations are shared via phone calls and emails. Additionally, teachers use an online grading system that keeps families constantly informed as to their children’s’ academic progress. One parent reported, and all present agreed, that teachers help parents understand what their children are doing in school and how to help them succeed by “not only sharing grades online, but also posting the theme of the units they’re working on.”
**Additional Finding**

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

**Impact**

Teachers' collaborations have strengthened their instructional capacity. Additionally, teacher voice has driven school goal adjustment as well as the implementation of learning environment improvement efforts.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The science teacher team met to review a forensics lesson during which students watched clips from the film *The Fugitive* as well as a documentary on the real-life figure on which *The Fugitive* was based. Teachers used a protocol that guided them to initially review the unit and supporting materials along with three student work samples that resulted from this unit. After using the unit’s rubric to ensure that all teachers would arrive at the same grade for all work samples, the teachers who had delivered the lesson revealed which of the three students had an individual education plan (IEP). Feedback from teachers included helpful suggestions on adjustments to the rubric layout that would likely result in increasing students’ understanding of the equal importance of the rating categories. Additionally, it was suggested that a model essay can have been provided so that students could have a tool for referencing an essay’s format and that students be issued a note-taking tool so that they can have an organized list of notes that would not be confused between the two sources of information.

- The Instructional Leadership Team consists of school leaders, grade team leaders and content area team leaders. The Instructional Leadership Team met to review the comprehensive educational plan (CEP) and collect feedback from their respective team members. This feedback, along with a survey of teachers’ needs, was then used by the Instructional Leadership Team to adjust the 2016-2017 school year instructional goals and strengthen their alignment to the school’s needs. Teachers determined that the instructional goals should include time-bound actionable steps such as the implementation of teacher intervisitations, deadlines for the submission of unit plans, as well as the implementation of learning environment improvement initiatives. Additionally, teacher surveys and the feedback that grade and content area team leaders gathered in meeting with their teams resulted in the decision to focus on three specific chapters of the common professional text used by faculty during PD.

- Teachers found that contact information for students were inconsistently reliable. A centralized database of family contact information was designed to address this concern. Teachers had a voice in the design and implementation of a program. It is intended to help decrease students' late arrival to class as well as the creation of a reliable and open-access tool for teachers to share not only up-to-date family contact information but also the notes that result from communication with families.