Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Cascades High School
High school 01M650
198 Forsyth St.
Manhattan
NY 10002

Principal: Ezequiel Garcia

Dates of Review:
March 28, 2017 - March 29, 2017

Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth
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

Cascades 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><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></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</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</td>
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</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</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</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</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</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</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

Structures are in place to provide personal attention to students by all staff members. The school community aligns professional development, family outreach, and learning experiences to support under credited students.

Impact

A respectful and valued learning environment promotes all students’ academic and personal growth leading to career and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership meets with all students individually during a personal meeting on the first day of their enrollment. In addition to personally welcoming the student, they clarify expectations to ensure they receive the academic and personal supports necessary to graduate and be college and career ready. Students appreciate the emotional support their school community provides and often continue to visit and meet with students and staff at the school once they have graduated. Teachers are valued and supported in their efforts to contribute to maintaining a positive culture. Several teachers expressed the ample opportunities they have to learn about new resources and how they are best utilized.

- A variety of after-school activities are offered for students each school day. Students select clubs including music, robotics, yearbook, fitness, or homework to further their interests and social interaction with peers. Teachers have created several initiatives, which contribute to students’ personal growth. For example, the “21 club” is an exclusive club that students are eligible to join after attending twenty-one consecutive days of school. Most recently, members are going to a regional amusement park. Additionally, names posted next to the honor roll are identified for “moving in the right direction.”

- Guidance counselors lead information sessions with students and their families to explain the importance of proper professional and effective communication strategies. Participants were informed of the negative consequences of miscommunication. Effective communication was stressed as a necessary lifelong skill. Students learn how to properly speak to a professor, a member of the staff, and classmates. Families expressed their amazement with the program offerings that allow their child to graduate in a timely manner with their friends from other schools.

- All students meet with their guidance counselor several times during their senior year to discuss their progress towards graduation and begin outreach to post-secondary educational institutions. A student meeting with the guidance counselor highlighted a review of the students’ transcript and credit tracker form to ensure the path towards graduation was on target. Additionally, they discussed the need to increase the communication with the desired college and the financial aid options available.
### Area of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, student work products and thinking are inconsistently supported by efforts to engage students in discussions and differentiated tasks. There is uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products as well as in students’ participation across classes.

### Impact

Students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, are not consistently able to successfully engage in tasks and discussions limiting their progress and achievement of their goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Staff expressed strong support for planning opportunities that will lead to having students engage in collaborative work and think critically. During an English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were challenged with discussing and creating questions about technology based on the novel *Fahrenheit 451*. In small groups, students rapidly created as many questions related to the theme in the time allotted. Subsequently they were challenged with modifying their questions so they required an open-ended thought provoking level of understanding. Students were surprised when they realized the vast majority of questions they initially created were low-level, closed response questions. The teacher tasked all groups to prioritize the three best questions that would lead to a high-quality discussion. Similarly engaging collaborative work discussions were not as effectively demonstrated in other classes. During a math class, the teacher asked students to explain how they knew the length of a mid-segment of a triangle however, after one student wrote his response the teacher corrected him and told him to write something else that the student knew to be correct.

- During a math class strips of paper with individual word problems were posted around the room. Groups of students were assigned to each station to work on the problem and be ready to explain the thinking that led to their solution. Most groups did not have an opportunity to finish their work yet, the teacher asked low-level procedural questions, such as “Why subtract 10?” It was apparent that students lacked the strategies needed to engage in this task and demonstrate competency. A visit to a class where students managed their own learning using online resources modeled how technology can assist with providing scaffolded learning opportunities for students in a foreign language. Students also used personal mobile devices to assist with answering some questions, although it was not fully clear if the use of their personal device supported increased learning or simply a quicker way to answer the question.

- Several students in a social studies class were provided annotated versions of the lesson’s primary sources. A political cartoon representing a truce signing during the Korean War included vocabulary words defined in the margins and identification of some historical figures depicted in the rendering. Additional documents highlighted some key words and clarified references for the reader. However, the limited variety of scaffolds and resources provided students prevented them from fully demonstrating their ability to think critically.
**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 staff ensure performance tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts emphasizing higher-order thinking skills, and writing argumentative essays.

**Impact**

Coherence and promotion of college and career readiness skills are embedded into instructional planning documents promoting development of rigorous learning habits and critical thinking skills.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across curriculum planning documents, integration of the instructional shifts in ELA is emphasized, specifically to engage students in rich and rigorous evidence based conversations about text with text-based answers. Lesson plans list the specific content standard and New York State Standards for students to read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding, literary response and expression, critical analysis and evaluation, and social interaction. The learning objective for a social studies lesson plan centered on evaluating the effectiveness of different political systems in forming governments. Students receive graphic organizers and supportive documents to help format their thinking and generate their written responses. Similarly, a science plan has students making a claim regarding what is meiosis using scientific reasoning. Students are given a tool to support their ability to generate a scientific explanation. Planned college and career skill activities include engaging students in reflection of their work and participation during group discussions.

- Curricular planning documents are written in terms of what students will be able to do. An ELA document lists one of the performance objectives as having students engage in formal academic discussion. The document includes standards-based activities for students to develop their discussion skills through engaging in a Socratic seminar addressing the concepts of fate and free will. The seminar requires students to actively take part in a formal discussion based on a text in which an open-ended question is presented to all participants. Students listen to their peers’ comments offering insight and critical feedback by articulating their own thoughts. The texts are tiered to ensure all students become active participants.

- Academic vocabulary is part of the instructional focus along with the emphasis of higher-order thinking across grades. This was seen in all planning documents reviewed. A U.S. history lesson plan includes understanding key words and vocabulary through a variety of higher-order essential questions, such as, “Why do you feel [President] Kennedy wanted Castro to be overthrown?” A plan for a foreign language class addresses relevant language conjugation and challenges students to properly use verbs both in their writing and in their oral interactions.
Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use benchmark assessments and feedback structures that are aligned with the school’s curricula to determine student progress towards credit accumulation and graduation.

Impact

Assessment results promote meaningful feedback to students and teachers and are used to adjust curricula and instruction. Feedback addresses student learning needs and provides their understanding of the next steps necessary for their achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- In discussing the feedback they received on their work, students were able to articulate clear next steps for improvement, particularly as it related to comments on their graphic organizers. Students generally felt the feedback allowed them to be more thoughtful, clear, and organized in resubmitting final drafts of their work. One student explained that as a result of the feedback she regularly receives her use of run-on sentences has diminished and her writing has become more organized. She has learned to write more clearly with evidence that directly supports her thinking.

- A uniform grading policy is in effect for all classes with an emphasis on lesson engagement by assessing classwork and participation, which informs students of their achievement. Rubrics are used to provide feedback to students on their work. Teachers have generated several rubrics across subjects to provide students an understanding of their competency in providing evidence, ability to summarize, and application of conventions. Student writing samples demonstrate increased achievement from baseline performance tasks using the suggested areas of growth from their teachers.

- Common assessments are used to determine students’ benchmark competencies. Students are encouraged to complete the assessment as best as they can while being told it will not affect their grade in a negative manner. Teachers use the results of the benchmark to help guide planning and instruction. The five weakest content-based standards are identified and purposefully integrated and aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards to provide more direct instruction. These five standards-based skills are deemed to be of central importance to each course within the department. Student mastery of these skills is reexamined on culminating assessments in the spring. Teachers reflect on this data, both individually and in teacher teams, to regularly adjust curricula throughout the semester.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders empower teacher leaders and consistently communicate high expectations regarding professionalism, school culture, and pedagogy to the entire staff. Staff establishes a culture of learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

School leaders established systems of training to support accountability regarding high expectations for teachers. Additionally, teachers meet regularly to provide ongoing and detailed feedback to students so they are prepared for their college or career after high school.

Supporting Evidence

- Guidance counselors meet with students to address equivalent credits necessary for a pathway to graduation. Students are made aware of their credit accumulation status. Students discuss college applications, financial aid support, and experiences with admission offices. Students are made aware of their college readiness and the steps necessary to attend graduation ceremonies. During one meeting with a guidance counselor a student discussed her desire to go to an out of state community college to develop a stronger background in science and ultimately attend medical school. A group of students who met with their guidance counselor, articulated their steps towards graduation, including establishing a deadline and pacing calendar to ensure success. Students also meet regularly with a non-profit agency during school hours to connect with employment and social-emotional support opportunities to enhance their quality of life both personally and academically.

- All students periodically attend an advisory class. During the class students are informed of the path to success. Folders are provided to students with their transcript, report cards, and goal setting forms. These are updated each marking period. Survey information from students after their advisory class indicates students strongly agree the period is engaging and helpful. More specifically they believe it helps them understand their credit accumulation, path to graduation, and what is needed to pass their classes. They are also given an opportunity to express how they think the advisory can be improved.

- School leadership provides supports for professional development connected to ensuring student engagement and providing differentiated instruction to address all students’ learning needs. The staff contributes to the professional development by leading workshops. Long-term teacher goals indicate their desire to be involved in designing effective professional development activities that meet their specific needs. Additionally, the administration frequently communicates expectations through newsletters, memos, and informal conversations. Before cycles of observations take place, informal instructional rounds are conducted to provide tips and suggestions to improve instruction.
**Additional Finding**

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that meet regularly and provide opportunities for ideas to be generated that support their professional growth.

**Impact**

Inquiry collaborations led by lead teachers strengthen their instructional capacity and the promotion of school goals. Distributed leadership opportunities have provided probationary and veteran teachers a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teams of teachers meet regularly to discuss student work and create new goals that help teachers collaborate across contents. During an observation of a teacher team, teachers reflected on modifications they had previously made to a graphic organizer used in a majority of classes to assist students with their writing. Teachers reviewed samples of student work to determine if their instructional changes were effective. One teacher noted she felt the changes were effective based on the quality of students’ topic sentences. Another teacher shared that the modeling practice helped his students. However, it was not clear how the teachers’ conversation would lead to increased mastery for the highest achieving learners, since much of the discussion was targeting specific low-to-mid achieving students.

- Minutes from several teacher team meetings indicate recommended next steps to promote improved teacher practice. Next steps included having students refrain from all “I” claims in paragraphs and sentence starters. The use of an exemplary essay was a suggested practice resulting from one meeting. Use of an instructional activity to help students select relevant quotes to support their claim was another next step.

- Serving in a multitude of positions, staff wears a variety of hats and contributes to furthering the mission of the high school, including unique approaches to address attendance. Most recently teachers established a twenty-one club to celebrate improved attendance. Teachers lead professional development workshops for students’ families and their peers based on an area of interest or having attended an offsite professional forum. Many teacher leaders are members of the Learning Partner Program (LPP) and visit other schools to identify best practices and support development of these practices at their school. LPP members also meet regularly with school leadership to review the work they are doing and plan professional development.