Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Queens High School for Language Studies
High school 25Q241
35-01 Union St.
Queens
NY 11354

Principal: Melanie Lee

Dates of Review:
December 13, 2016 - December 14, 2016

Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción
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


School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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 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>Developing</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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</thead>
<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>Additional Finding</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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</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</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>Area of Celebration</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>
Findings

A culture of collaboration in the school allows school leaders and peers to engage in the teacher feedback process aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Both school leader and peer feedback accurately captures teacher practice including strengths and challenges.

Impact

Teachers welcome the feedback from strategic and frequent cycles of observation, providing them with clear next steps and support for their practice aligned to their professional goals for instruction and pedagogy.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participate in frequent cycles of peer observations aligned to the school’s foci on student engagement and designing instruction. Post observation, the teacher observed is invited to a forum where peers rate the practice observed relative to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and review student work from the lesson. School leaders attend these sessions looking to ensure the teachers are calibrated in their ratings and that there is a clear understanding of how both the practice and student work products align to the ratings. Any area that is not calibrated becomes the focus of teacher professional development. A teacher who was recently observed by her peers shared that they helped her realize that she needed to plan for a longer work period if she wanted students to engage and be able to complete the work.

- Teachers stated that peer observation is a key underpinning of the school, a way of building a common language, and understanding and trust in the community. By creating a transparency around teacher practice, teachers are able to share both their hopes and fears about participating in the peer observations. This willingness to share classroom practice was modeled by the principal who invited teachers to rate a video of her teaching a lesson. Teachers articulated that this practice has strengthened their understanding on “lesson planning and execution” aligned to the school focus. A new teacher shared how she spent a week in the summer calibrating teacher practice with other teachers as part of an orientation to the school. She stated that her understanding of teacher practice has deepened through participating in peer observations and feedback conversations.

- Teachers stated that the most powerful feedback capturing their practice comes at the end-of-year “summative conference” with school leaders. Teachers use reflection forms from both the end-of-year conference and ones developed after the prior summer’s professional development session, to set professional goals for the upcoming school year. A review of yearlong formal and informal observations evidenced that school leaders provide teachers with feedback that includes clear expectations aligned to their goals. In one report the principal noted, “A goal of yours this year has been to incorporate more literacy instruction in your content” and commended the teacher for making “purposeful decisions” to meet the goal by including more time for writing. This observation also outlined clear expectations by suggesting that the teacher give students checklists for revisions and peer feedback in order to establish student autonomy.

- Teachers and administrators use guiding questions aligned to the school foci and teachers’ professional goals to provide feedback to each other. A guiding question that focused on a practice instead of one specific finding was evident in an observation report commending a teacher for using a “review sheet that allowed students to note which learning objectives they were mastering.” The guiding question asked the teacher to reflect on “How self-assessment might be incorporated throughout the unit.” Thus, teachers stated guiding questions have helped them think about their personal and collective instructional and assessment practices in a broader manner.
Findings

Teaching strategies, such as modeling and use of a translation program, provide limited multiple entry points into the curricula and missed opportunities for high-level student discussion and work products.

Impact

This approach leads to uneven student engagement in appropriately challenging tasks, hinders their demonstration of higher-order thinking, and limits student participation.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade eleven English Language Arts class (ELA), with an aim of “I can strengthen my supporting evidence and analysis by applying the rubric,” the teacher modeled the use of linking words by reading a number of paragraphs on the interactive white board and then explaining them. However, students were not engaged in thinking during this mini lesson. The teacher then asked students to trade essays with their partners and to provide feedback as modeled. Students were observed sitting silently and unengaged. When questioned, some students said that they were unclear as to where or how to provide feedback. Only four students provided their partner with feedback such as “you need to add more transitions,” or “you need to cite more evidence.” The feedback was generic and did not directly address the needs in the peer essays.

- The warm up activity in a Mandarin-language math class, required students to go to a website to learn about invasive species as a way of having students understand exponential growth. All students viewed a video in English, and used a worksheet written in both English and Mandarin. Some students typed into a translation program on their laptop that converted Mandarin into English; however, despite this support, most worksheets were blank and students were unable to respond to the teacher’s questions although they were posed in Mandarin. Only one student, who spoke in Mandarin, was able to provide an answer using his computer to display the sentence, “Invasive species do not belong and are foreign.” Students spent the majority of their practice time translating between two languages rather than actively engaging in math.

- In a Geometry class, students worked in pairs and small groups to label diagrams and compare shapes, specifically using the postulate side, angle, side (SAS), to decide if a pair of triangles with an unknown side were congruent. Students were heard using math vocabulary such as transformation, corresponding pairs of sides and congruency, as they discussed and applied theorems. However, this level of engagement and discussion was not seen in other classes. In a Participation in Government class students used a structured discussion protocol to examine a question on limiting presidential power. Conversation was limited to four students who gave their opinion and called on a peer to comment. Students who were invited to comment limited their answers to “Yes, I agree with you.”

- In many classrooms, scaffolds included heavy teacher modeling, structured discussion protocols, and worksheets. In a majority of classes, students worked with one abridged, undifferentiated text of no more than four paragraphs. Students were tasked with reading these paragraphs and writing a one-paragraph summary, thus limiting student ability to demonstrate higher-order thinking. Student work consisted primarily of worksheets and outline organizers containing explicit prompts with lengthy explanation of the prompt. One outline worksheet was divided into five boxes, one box for the topic sentence, historical context, detail, and analysis. Each box contained directions and had three sentences explaining the directions in each of the five boxes.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum

Rating: Proficient

Findings
School leaders have selected Common Core-aligned curricula that include the instructional shifts such as a focus on academic vocabulary. Student tasks consistently emphasize rigor.

Impact
School leaders’ purposeful curricula decisions, such as foci on argument writing and academic vocabulary, promote rigor and college and career readiness for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of teacher planning documents shows a focus on academic vocabulary for all subjects, and the use of annotations. An ELA curriculum map for students with limited English proficiency shows that students are exposed to different literary genres that change in text complexity over the course of the year. Students read mysteries, short stories, and novels such as The Giver. Students engage in different types of writing from expository to argument writing, and write essays that demand literary and thematic analysis. Students learn to develop claims, cite evidence, and engage in research across sources to develop a thesis statement and defend their position.

- The Common Core Algebra curriculum requires students to engage in rigorous tasks that reflect the instructional shifts of conceptual understanding and application as students are required to write equations in different but equivalent forms and to learn quadratic functions as well as square roots and cube root functions. Students are required to summarize, represent, and interpret data on two categorical and quantities values, and build models that show relationships between quantities.

- Students are expected to engage in tasks that demand higher-order thinking skills. In an advance placement United States History unit, students are required to read manuscripts from historical figures such as William Bradford and John Winthrop to learn about the divergent thinking that led to the separation from the Anglican Church. Additionally, students are required to write an expository essay evaluating how the Puritan movement influenced the political, social, and economic facets of early America in the 1600’s. In another unit, students read writings from various nineteenth century utopian societies such as the Brook Farm, Shakers, and Oneida, and evaluate reformers’ perspectives to explain how popular movements and activist groups have changed American society.

- The curriculum map for biology shows that students learn about cell diffusion, homeostasis, the immune system, and genetics. Units in this yearlong curriculum require students to learn how to represent data in graphs, analyze trends, learn how to conduct a controlled experiment, and appropriately draw conclusions from the data. Students also engage in argument writing on the ethics of genetic engineering in order to prepare them for college-level writing.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment Rating: Developing

Findings

Checklists and rubrics are not always aligned to the school’s curricula. Assessment practices such as checks for understandings are inconsistently used across classrooms.

Impact

Some rubrics and checklist provide limited feedback and do not assist students in improving their work. When check for understandings are used, they do not always result in effective adjustments that meet students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Many of the school's rubrics provide feedback only for an outline of a student’s essay, but do not address the finished product. “Outline feedback” documents were observed on many bulletin boards across the school as well as in student work folders. An “outline feedback” form aligned to a piece of student writing consisted of three checklists, each one specific to a finding, including “Strength of Outline, Next Steps, and Overall.” A blue highlighted line in the strength box read, “There is clearly thoughtful analysis in the outline.” A blue highlighted line in the next step box read, “Missing Claim.” For the “Overall” comment, there was a check next to a line that read, “Almost! Make a few adjustments while writing your essay.” Thus, this type of limited feedback hinders a student from gaining clear insights and focused next steps to write a successful essay.

- Limited feedback was also evidenced with a science rubric on electromagnetic attraction, whereby the teacher provided the student with positive feedback, but a low score. While the teacher commented on how well the student ordered elements on the periodic table, the student received a score of three out of four. The student reflection below the rubric stated, “I found that I only received a lower grade because I missed a few parts in certain sections. This actually surprised me because I thought I was through.” Thus, teacher feedback missed providing the student with a clear sense of what was needed to achieve a higher score.

- Some essay checklists include “Yes” as a level four, “Somewhat” for levels three to two, and provide a numerical score with no written feedback. Some rubrics focus only on vocabulary and organization and have no content criteria. An ELA rubric, several pages long, contains commentary explaining each component of the rubric and examples of language to use at each level. The length and content of this document limits its value as an evaluative tool. Additionally, as many rubrics are loosely aligned to the curriculum they do not provide students with quality focused feedback to support them in improving their work.

- Checks for understanding were not present in the majority of classes visited and when used, they do not always result in effective adjustments. In a grade-ten ELA class focusing on the novel Pride and Prejudice the teacher asked the students to attend to “the emotional charge of the language used”. As students worked in groups, she listened to the discussion and realized that they were talking about plot instead of language. She read a line, refocused students’ attention on the language the author used to convey tone, and then some students were heard discussing the formal tone of the character. However, in a Mandarin-language Living Environment class with the aim of “I can propose the purpose of DNA and how its organization contributes to its function,” students’ worksheets were largely blank except for a drawing of a gene. The teacher reviewed the information on the worksheet several times and asked students to answer his question. While students offered information, the teacher rejected their answer or told them that they had part of the answer. Students appeared confused and could not provide answers, but no adjustment was made for students’ learning needs.
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 consistently communicate expectations to teachers throughout the school year as well as in the summer professional development attended by all staff members. Teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations to all students.

Impact
While teachers understand school expectations and are provided with support and feedback, not all students feel the same about their own educational experience and preparedness for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers participate in summer professional development. New teachers spend a week with school leaders where they become familiar with the school handbook, goals, philosophy, lesson planning expectations, and watch videos on instruction to learn how to rate instruction according to Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Returning teachers attend for the next week and partner with new teachers to provide support, learn, and plan together. Teachers review data from the Regents exams and identify students who will need support to stay on track for graduation. In addition, Teachers are held accountable during the school year to review student data during Tuesday parent engagement nights when they meet with students who are off track to graduate.

- When students were asked how they were being prepared for the next level, students shared the fact that they are taking Regents. They also stated that they meet with advisors and the college counselor to review their transcripts. Seniors spoke about the college application process and checklists of items that they need to complete. One senior shared that her present class work such as researching and writing argument papers prepares her for college level work. She stated that she knows that because she is currently taking a college class. She went on to add that another thing she learned is that the college had an expectation that she would be able to do rigorous work with minimal support from teachers or peers. She stated that in college there is no turn-and-talk, no graphic organizers with prompts, and no opportunity to rehearse what you are thinking with a partner. She said the expectation is that “students work independently” and “have a tool kit of strategies for getting the work done.” She stated that college exposure is helping her learn to adapt to working independently. Another student at the meeting expressed concern about going to college. He said that he had registered and attended a college class as well, but unlike his peer, he was not prepared to make the adaptation from supported high-level work to independent college level work, so he dropped out of the college class.

- During the student meeting, students stated that while they have received transcript advisement, financial aid planning, and guidance on how to apply to college, their concern is that much of the work that they produce is still heavily teacher directed, as they pointed to the long running comments on their work or the series of graphic organizers. They shared that while their teachers expect them to go to college, given what their peer had stated about dropping out of his College Now class; they wondered how well they were being prepared for college-level work.
## 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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**Findings**

Teachers work collaboratively across grades and content areas to promote the school's goals on designing instruction and assessments. Teacher surveys and feedback sessions allow for distributive leadership.

**Impact**

Teachers work in multiple inquiry-based collaborations that allow them to examine their practice and student work. Distributive leadership structures enable teachers to have a voice in student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- During a teacher team meeting, teachers used the “slice” protocol for looking at student work and gave the presenting teacher cool and warm feedback on the use of a new graphic organizer designed to help support students in addressing all the elements in their argument essay. Teachers looked at the student work to examine how students used evidence. Teachers stated that as a result of looking at student writing, including Regents exams, they realized that either students are not using the correct evidence to make their point, or in cases where they used evidence, they did not concretely tie their evidence to their claim. Teachers stated that by examining student work, they had a better understanding of what students needed to do to strengthen their argument writing. Teachers agreed that the organizer served as a checklist to support the writer and they agreed to collect the next on-demand writing piece to look for the students’ ability to use evidence.

- School leaders survey staff frequently. In one survey, teachers suggested that students be programmed by language proficiency. As a result, students have been programmed on each grade, by language proficiency, in order to increase time for language development. On grade nine, ten, and eleven, there is a content-block schedule for English proficient students, one for English Language Learners, (ELLs), and one for former ELLs. Teachers feel that this allows them to provide the correct level of support at different stages of language development.

- Feedback from a teacher survey on planning and professional development showed that teachers wanted to partner with colleagues who had similar professional needs. As a result, there is tiered differentiation in both professional development and in planning time, and teachers have become more thoughtful in their practice with students. One teacher’s reflection sheet from a Danielson Framework for Teaching professional development showed how his understanding deepened. In this reflection, the teacher stated that initially he did not think about the purpose behind instructional strategies and saw it more like graduate school theory. However, now the teacher states, “I learned that all my instructional strategies and tasks must be purposeful.”

- Teachers can select to work on curriculum including refinement of lessons and their objectives, the development of scaffolds to support student mastery, and/or summative or formative assessments. Decisions are made based on personal preference as well as each teacher’s professional goals that are aligned to school goals. Through the self-selection of work streams, teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect improving their practice and student learning.