Quality Review Report

2016-2017

High School for Contemporary Arts
High school 11X544
800 East Gun Hill Rd.
Bronx
NY 10467

Principal: Pedro Cubero

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

Lead Reviewer: Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop
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

High School for Contemporary Arts 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>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>
<td></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>
<td></td>
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<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>
<td></td>
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</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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</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>
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<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>
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<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>
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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>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:** Well Developed

**Findings**

The school community’s approach to culture building, discipline, and social-emotional support results in a safe environment and inclusive culture that promotes progress toward the school’s goals. Structures are in place so that each student is known well by at least one adult who helps to personalize attendance supports and coordinate social-emotional learning.

**Impact**

The school meaningfully involves student voice in decision-making to initiate, guide, and lead school improvement efforts. Youth development and guidance supports impact students’ academic and personal behaviors.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leadership, teachers, and students are committed to ensuring that their school is safe, secure, and has an orderly environment in which teaching and learning take place each day. There is a collective belief that in order for the school to be inclusive and respectful, all stakeholders have to be on the same page and have mutual respect. For example, in the school’s ladder of referral, there are three levels that include infractions and the accompanying interventions. Staff members are consistently encouraged to speak with the student privately either during or after class and to notify parents by either calling home, sending a letter, or via email. All interventions are noted either in the New Visions data tool or teacher’s record book. Both faculty and staff stated there has been a significant decrease in the number of student infractions during the current school year. Level one to five incidents, year-to-date, have decreased from 117 to 52, and student suspensions have decreased from 48 to 17.

- Based on students’ determination and drive, the principal agreed to the creation of an events committee. According to the principal, “They’re the movers and shakers of the school. When they decide they want to do something, they do it.” For example, the students took the initiative to invite a councilman to a Black History month celebration with the principal’s approval and the councilman agreed and attended. The students also wanted the school’s after-school clubs and course offerings to reflect more arts based options, considering that the focus of the school is contemporary arts. However, most of the students interviewed believed this was an area that was lacking in the past. Under the current leadership, students feel empowered. There is a former storage space that was transformed into a theater space, called The Black Box, which different arts programs and clubs are able to utilize. The school administration and students believe that the increased student involvement in the arts has had a direct positive impact on attendance and lateness percentages. The number of students with 95 percent and above attendance rates has increased from 35 percent during the previous school year to 42 percent for the current school year to date.

- Guidance counselors and Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Services (SAPIS) counselors conduct in class lessons and town halls for each grade on life skills such as persistence, grit, and self-advocacy, where discussions focus on managing personal conflicts. These discussions are then chronicled in a writing piece to encourage students to see their progress, considering it isn’t always immediately evident to them. Students also engage in restorative circles, which are also attributed to the decrease in student incidents and increase in attendance. As stated by a teacher who is trained and involved in the restorative practices, “The school has become restorative as opposed to punitive. We have found resources for students and the Restorative Circle groups have not only been helpful for the students, it’s benefited the staff as well.” Another staff member concurred, stating, “We’re not looking to suspend students anymore. We look at them holistically now.”
# 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, teaching strategies, including questioning and the use of scaffolds, inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, leading to uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks. All students are not yet demonstrating higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

## Impact

Across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student participation and thinking.

## Supporting Evidence

- During classroom observations, some teachers made attempts to engage students in discussion through grouping and the use of multiple entry points. However, the low level questioning and accompanying responses contributed to students having difficulty completing their tasks, which led to student work product inconsistencies. In some classes student groupings were unclear about either the directions or objective of the lesson. For example, during a science lesson on recognizing the rate of reactions and in an English as a New Language lesson on determining the meaning of a word using context clues and providing evidence from the text, some groupings or pairings existed logistically but not functionally. In a self-contained special education class, groupings were a combination of homogeneous and heterogeneous performance levels and students were able to articulate the lesson’s focus on the benefits of annotation.

- Student participation and discussion was limited at times because of low level questioning and students using a lot of time to copy off of the board. However, in an Advanced Placement (AP) English Language Arts (ELA) class, the teacher handed out notes already printed for students, asked higher level questions and adjusted students’ groupings based on their responses. Students were able to articulate the purpose of the lesson that focused on privacy and the government as well as hold each other accountable by challenging responses or asking each other to highlight the part of the text they used to support their answers.

- During a math lesson on finding the missing sides and angles of a right triangle, students were asked “When do you use the Pythagorean Theorem?”, “What is a Pythagorean triple?”, and “What do you know about isosceles right triangles?” Multiple entry points consisted of heterogeneous pairings and groupings, use of a calculator, and scaffolded questions. Even with the efforts that were made using the scaffolds and differentiation, some students were unclear on how to solve the problems as evidenced by their incomplete worksheets and their group discussions.
**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 Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

**Impact**

Purposeful decisions are made to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. The curricula is accessible to a variety of learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, however, academic tasks are not embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects so that all learners must demonstrate their thinking.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are planned to include student centered tasks that are rigorous, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards at the appropriate level of difficulty, and include multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their critical thinking. This is accomplished through tiered questioning, student-to-student discussions, and challenges to support and justify their answers through textual evidence when speaking and writing. Lesson plan templates included the specific learning objective and aim for the lesson, the State and Common Core Learning Standard, needed materials and resources, essential academic vocabulary, higher-order thinking questions, differentiation strategies and multiple entry points to ensure that all students would engage appropriately in the lesson. An ELA lesson plan analyzed the language and structure of an author’s word choice and included academic vocabulary such as self-reliance, grit, ratified, and hindrance. Differentiation strategies for students with disabilities and ELLs included graphic organizers with partial notes, groupings by ability level based on pre-assessment data, and Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* levels one and two questions focused on identification, recalling key terms, analyzing, and inferring the main idea.

- A theater unit on developing artistry included the exploration questions “What is a director’s role?”, “How do actors work with directors?”, and “How do they work together creatively and effectively?” Learning objectives focused on students being able to uncover the director’s role in playmaking, investigating how the director, playwright, and actor work together, and identifying what skills a director must cultivate and use to work most effectively. In addition, students were expected to make connections and apply their collaborative skills to make creative choices together. The unit was aligned with the Theater Blueprint standards for theater making, knowledge and understanding, and theater process.

- A social studies unit integrating the arts centered on “Finding the Story Inside the Painting”, which explored three paintings that inspired Tracy Chevalier’s writing. Students used observations and interpretation skills to analyze narrative elements in a painting and visually convey a story through the use of characters, pose, and setting. The unit provided students with the opportunity to choose which painting would be analyzed and as noted in the unit, a TED Talk on-line video also entitled “Finding the story inside the painting” was shown to provide multiple entry points for ELLs and students with disabilities and as a support to complete the assignment.
**Additional Finding**

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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**Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are not yet aligned with the school’s curricula. Teachers’ assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

**Impact**

Limited feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet students’ learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Rubrics are used with classroom tasks and project assignments and students were able to speak to their benefits when provided to them. Feedback on student work in classrooms, on hallway boards, and in work portfolios was inconsistent. Some student work included comments such as “Excellent” and “Great Job” and feedback was provided to students who scored levels 2 or 3 but not 4 on a grading scale of 0 to 4. Additionally, there were some student work products with failing grades and the students did not receive any feedback other than an “x” mark while higher performing student work received minimal feedback.

- Checks for understanding attempts included thumbs up, down, or sideways. Exit tickets were used in some classes, however not all students completed them or some students copied answers from each other, indicating the assessment did not give the teacher and student a clear sense of their understanding. Kahoot, a game based learning platform used by some teachers, provided teachers with on the spot data to assess student learning while also providing a risk-free environment for students to answer questions and to assess their own learning.

- Students commented that the quality and timeliness of feedback from their teachers varies across content areas. Students in AP courses across content areas and theater strongly agreed that they receive actionable and meaningful feedback regularly and it helps them to improve their grades. A student mentioned the feedback he received on his script project gave him the opportunity to improve and because of the feedback, his grade improved. Students also commented favorably on using PupilPath, an online gradebook for parent and student use. However, they stated that not all of their teachers update their grades in PupilPath on a regular basis and that they sometimes have to remind their teachers.
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 communicate high expectations based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

Professional learning is provided to the staff and there is a system of accountability to achieve high expectations. Ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance supports to students on college and career readiness prepare them for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The leadership team has facilitated Danielson *Framework for Teaching* aligned workshops for the faculty, including how to incorporate writing across the contents with a focus on argumentative, informational, and narrative writing. Cross curricular collaboration to identify opportunities for interdisciplinary connections has provided teachers with additional professional learning time to ensure that curricula are aligned to the standards and work toward having a culture of mutual accountability. An example of one of the curricular units that came about from the school leadership team’s expectation is the social studies and art plan on “Finding the Story Inside the Painting.”

- Communication from school leaders on high expectations was messaged to staff at the first professional learning session of the school year. Routines, procedures, classroom environment, and items from the staff handbook regarding bulletin boards, syllabi, and technology in the classroom were discussed and clarified. A long-time faculty member at the school stated the benefit of re-visiting the staff handbook and collectively discussing how teachers were being held accountable in addition to their regular class observations. “I realized I had a skewed point of view and wasn’t approaching teaching and discipline in the right way. As a school we have realized what we were doing wasn’t working”, commented the teacher. Subsequently, student scholarship percentages have increased, year to date, across all content areas during the first marking period. Theater course pass rates increased from 80 percent to 100 percent and social studies increased from 65 percent to 80 percent.

- All students meet with their counselors to discuss their academic standing, including credit accumulation and Regents exam pass status, and must sign a graduation requirements contract along with their parent, acknowledging the meeting and any supports that may be needed to reach their respective next levels. In addition, counselors and teacher teams use credit gaps data to inform their conversations with students and each other. The credit gap data includes student name, official class, cohort, expected diploma type, planned graduation date, and credit gaps.

- Students have attended college trips to City, State, and private schools, and in preparation for the trips, students attend financial aid workshops and participate in a professional interviewing skills session. Students are also enrolled in the College Now program at Lehman College and all students passed their courses for the fall semester, receiving a range of grades from A- to B. The number of students accepted into the program has doubled for the spring semester.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Support and Supervision</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 promote the achievement of school goals. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity.

**Impact**

The instructional capacity of teachers is strengthening. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- All teachers are engaged in collaborative professional meetings in grade level and content area teams. Teachers’ responsibilities during these meetings encompass looking at student work, writing across the curriculum, reviewing and analyzing Regents data, and when applicable, compliance as it relates to programming for students with disabilities and ELLs. Teacher experience and comfort levels with technology and use of data vary across departments. In order to support teachers, administrators who are members of the teacher teams have been open to recommendations made by teachers to grow in these areas. For example, a review of a social studies team meeting agenda and minutes included the grading policy, deep data analysis, use of Skedula for grade entries, and a curriculum check-in.

- Each department team has a teacher lead who works with the leadership team. According to the school administration and teachers, the faculty is sharing more, and it has been evident in the instructional strategies being used, including the use of technology such as incorporating Kahoot, which started with one teacher. "Teachers are moving away from teacher centered instruction and you can see the impact in teacher observations", stated an assistant principal. Another instructional strategy teachers agree they are including in their planning is the incorporation of jigsaw activities.

- Special education teachers report that they have increased levels of trust and attribute this to the collaboration with guidance counselors and support from the administration based on teachers communicating their challenges. Teachers have seen improvements in the quality of postsecondary transition plans for students with disabilities, which have informed how teachers and counselors are supporting this group of students, who make up 29 percent of the school’s population. “Teachers were working in isolation and now we’re working together”, stated a teacher. Based on the school's most recent School Quality Snapshot report, the school earned a rating of “good” for helping this group of students graduate in four years.