Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Rachel Carson High School for Coastal Studies

High School 21K344
521 West Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11224

Principal: Edward Wilensky

Dates of Review:
October 18, 2017 - October 19, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Michele Ashley
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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</tbody>
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## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>
<td>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</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>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</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</table>
Area of Celebration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

The school community’s approach to culture building incorporates restorative justice practices, incentives, and small group discussions. School leaders align professional development opportunities, family involvement, and a variety of student experiences to develop positive attitudes among all stakeholders.

**Impact**

Established norms and opportunities for student voice result in a safe, respectful, and inclusive culture. Restorative circles and a schoolwide focus on four attributes promote the adoption of positive student academic and personal behaviors.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Restorative practices are in place at the school to support their articulated goal of “Every student, every day.” Leadership shared that occurrence data revealed that the majority of school incidents involved students in grades nine and ten and that they occurred in particular locations within the school. Staff and student council members also shared with leadership that safety was of particular concern in hallways and student restrooms. To address these needs, advisory was implemented for grades nine and ten, with small group discussions known as restorative circles that explore difficult topics and resolve conflicts using a social emotional curriculum. Advisory includes topics such as being left out, what adults need to understand, and dealing with inside and outside hurts. There is a plan in place to expand advisory and small group supports to grades eleven and twelve over the next two years. This year, grades eleven and twelve receive restorative practice lessons in homerooms and participate in a variety of support groups as needed throughout the day and during lunch. To reduce incidents in halls and restrooms, faculty created a new system to closely monitor student bathroom passes. Staff now monitors the halls outside of student restrooms and teachers volunteered to permit students to use the single occupancy restrooms to provide privacy and security. Students shared that the hallways feel safer with the adults present and the bathrooms are safer and cleaner now that students use them one at a time.

- Administration, teachers and students shared that student behavior expectations align to four OARS attributes. OARS is a school created acronym that identifies Ownership, Achievement, Respect and Safety as symbols that “students are moving in the right direction.” OARS posters are in all classrooms and hallways and support the school's behavior intervention program. Teachers reward students who demonstrate the OARS habits with Carson Coins, which are electronically deposited into students’ online grading accounts. Students use the online coins to purchase items in the school store or to earn participation in events. Students shared that restorative circles help them resolve issues that arise with peers and that teachers take the time to privately speak with students if they are not behaving according to the OARS expectations.

- Ten teachers are trained to facilitate restorative circles and fifteen teachers are trained in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools (TCIS). The professional development plan includes a January 2018 all staff training in conflict resolution circles. Leadership shares targeted OARS values with parents and teachers that demonstrate how they can model values for students. Student support groups take place throughout the day to develop OARS behaviors, including groups created for students returning from suspension, the Welcome Back club, and a Student Rebound Club for under-credited students. Since the adoption of restorative practices and small group supports in 2015 - 2016, student incidents have decreased by 31 percent. This year, 90 percent of the students in the Rebound Club have voluntarily enrolled in additional classes to earn extra credits. Taken together, experiences provided for teachers, students and families promote the adoption of OARS behaviors.
Area of Focus

<table>
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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

Although teachers across classrooms use and create rubrics and assessments that align to the curricula and Common Core Learning Standards, feedback to students is limited and does not consistently provide actionable next steps. Teachers in some classrooms use questioning to check for understanding, but the use of self-assessment practices is limited such that effective adjustments are not consistently made.

Impact

Limited feedback to students and the inconsistent use of self-assessment do not provide students with actionable next steps, hindering their ability to improve their work. Teachers’ inconsistent use of effective checks for understanding limits instructional adjustments to more effectively meet all students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers attached content specific rubrics to most assignments in student folders and on bulletin boards across classes. Rubrics align to the New York State performance levels and describe performance from below to above grade level. Rubrics in all content areas identify the specific criteria and levels of achievement from Levels 1 to 4. Although most rubrics identify sections for teacher feedback and next steps, the provision and quality of next steps were inconsistent. On a math example, teacher comments highlighted the student’s work as “neat and organized with the correct units” and the next steps asked the student to be more creative. Teacher feedback on an English assignment stated, “Well done” and asked the student to clarify the thesis and review basic writing mechanics. Teacher feedback lacked clear next steps and there was little evidence of students’ use of the rubrics or next steps to guide or make improvements to their work.

- Teachers implement checks for understanding using questioning and by listening to student responses. Among some of the visited classrooms, teachers circulated around the room asking questions to assess students' levels of understanding. In these classes, teachers provided moments of additional support before moving on and in some cases returned to students to assess their progress. Some teachers have begun to incorporate hand signals and number cards that students can use to indicate their level of understanding. In one science class, students used cards numbered one to four. The teacher responded promptly to student cards requesting support and prompted them with questions or sent students back to their annotated text to find the answers. In this class, students returned to their annotated articles and used their own highlighting to find the answers to their questions. However, the level of response and adjustment to instruction in this class was not present across classes. In another science class, the teacher asked students, “Has everyone got this?” This teacher moved forward with the lesson although some students did not respond and some responded negatively. In a math lesson, the teacher modeled for a struggling student but did not support him in completing a problem on his own.

- Students shared that they “sometimes” engage in peer-assessment by trading writing assignments with classmates and looking at writing rubrics to provide feedback. A review of student work revealed some writing tasks with peer feedback. Students signed their names to the front of their classmates writing piece and wrote compliments or areas for improvement in the margins of the paper. On one essay on the mood and tone of *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe, a student providing peer feedback wrote “I agree that the mood was sinister and spine chilling.” This student also wrote, “You should probably use more quotes to demonstrate your point.” Although evidence of peer assessment was present on some writing samples, student self-assessment is not a common practice in classrooms across content areas.
Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula align to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and purposefully integrate academic vocabulary and writing from sources in lessons and unit plans. Curricular tasks in lesson plans consistently emphasize annotation and the citing of evidence across grades and subjects.

Impact

Purposeful decisions ensure alignment to the Common Core, build coherence, and promote college and career readiness. Curricula and tasks promote the development of higher-order skills for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- An adopted common lesson plan format ensures that lessons align to the Common Core and content standards. Across most reviewed lesson plans, teachers clearly identify the standards that align to the learning objectives in each lesson. In a science lesson on enzymes, the teacher includes the Living Environment standard for major understanding and the English Language Arts (ELA) standard for attending to precise details of explanations or descriptions. In an English lesson on the characters of *The Great Gatsby*, the teacher identifies the reading standard for citing strong and thorough textual evidence and the speaking and listening standard for initiating and participating in collaborative discussion.

- Teachers purposefully integrate the introduction of academic and content vocabulary and writing from sources across content areas. Reviewed lesson plans indicate that teachers create opportunities for students to define complex vocabulary and plan to create vocabulary reference charts throughout the units. In a math lesson plan, the lesson includes a discussion of the definition of the term *algebraic inequalities*. This lesson also includes a template for a vocabulary chart students will use to identify algebraic symbols, align them to key mathematical terms, and provide examples of the symbols in context. In addition to vocabulary content, lessons across subjects require students to cite sources and support statements with text based evidence. A history lesson on classical civilizations plans for the introduction of key vocabulary, including *dynasty*, *legalism*, and *oppressive*. This lesson also requires students to analyze documents and use document-based evidence to determine if the identified ruler is a villain or a hero.

- Across unit and lesson plans, curricular documents require students to use annotation to increase comprehension and support their answers with evidence. In a math lesson on writing and translating algebraic equations, the plan asks students to come up to the board to “annotate the problem” and “justify their solution.” In an earth science lesson plan, the teacher plans to pose the question, “How can the topography of Manhattan be redesigned to mitigate flooding?” The teacher includes an article, entitled *Topography and Flooding*, and plans to provide students time to read the article and then reread the article to annotate the text. The lesson includes an Annotation Checklist as a resource for successful annotations. After annotating the text, students are required to decide which factor contributes to flooding most severely and to defend their position using evidence from the text.
Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:**

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<tr>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

Teaching practices across most classrooms align to the school’s articulated beliefs around annotation, exposure to complex text, and the comprehension of academic vocabulary. Teachers provide entry points for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, using visual images, prompts, translations, and language partners.

**Impact**

A focused set of beliefs and selected scaffolds engage students in appropriately challenging tasks and support students in demonstrating higher order thinking skills in student work products.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across the visited classrooms, teachers used annotation to support comprehension of complex text. In a history class, the teacher asked students to analyze and annotate eight documents focused on the reign of Emperor Shi Huangdi that included high-level text, photos and illustrations. Students in this class worked independently and chose the order in which to approach the texts. Charts throughout this classroom identified academic and content vocabulary associated with the units on Ancient China, such as, Confucius, The Great Wall, dynasty, Mandate of Heaven, legalism, and oppressive. Students in this class annotated using underlining, highlighting, and notes with definitions and questions. In a math class, the teacher asked students to annotate a challenging math problem before attempting to construct a solution. Students observed and then used a common annotation strategy posted on a chart that asked the question, “How do we annotate in math?” These students marked up the problem and identified important information by circling numbers and underlining key words.

- Across grades and content areas, teachers focus on exposing students to academic and content vocabulary as evident in classroom charts and word walls. Word walls include visual images and examples to support comprehension by all students. In a math classroom, the word wall defines and provides examples of number sentence, truth-value, algebraic sentence, set notation and identity. In an earth science classroom, word wall charts define and provide visuals for tier 1, 2, and 3 words. A tier 3 chart includes the terms topography, elevation, contour lines, isolines, and index contour.

- Teachers across classrooms provide students with scaffolds to engage them in their tasks and support them in producing meaningful work products. In a grade nine class, the teachers provided ELLs, students with disabilities and at risk students with “pre-annotated” documents to support their understanding of the text. Teachers use underlining, notes, question prompts and sentence starters to guide students through tasks. In this class, students used the annotated text to complete prompts and respond to the teacher’s questions before completing their graphic organizer. Students in this class stated that the annotated text allowed them to read the texts at their own pace and find the information they needed to complete the graphic organizer. Teachers strategically partner students who require language support with same language peers who provide translations and explanations in the home language, as needed. In a Spanish class, the teacher assigned students to heterogeneous groups so that dominant English and dominant Spanish speakers could support one another through the tasks. In this class, students worked together to annotate Spanish text and engaged in a question and answer activity that required all students to ask or answer questions in Spanish.
## 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 communicate high expectations to all staff via professional development, weekly emails, shared scholarship data and verbal and written feedback. Teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations for all students via Regents aligned rubrics, use of an online grading platform, guidance and advisement supports, and access to Advanced Placement (AP) and college level courses.

### Impact

Professional development supports and holds teachers accountable for meeting expectations. Teachers and guidance staff provide ongoing supports to students that prepare them for the next level of learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- **Weekly emails from school leadership to all staff highlight instructional expectations, professional responsibilities, development opportunities, and weekly achievements of faculty members.** Leadership uses emails to clearly articulate teacher and leadership responsibilities each week. One September email reminded teachers to upload curriculum documents to their respective online folders, including a minimum of two unit plans, a summative assessment for each unit, and at least one reflection in the assessment tracker for their students. Additional September emails celebrate staff for working diligently to ensure that all students are properly programmed in classes, supporting students in small group meetings, hallways and the cafeteria, and registering students for online courses to acquire needed class credit. An October email identified the dates, times and team members for department level inquiry meetings.

- **Leadership requires teachers to monitor student scholarship data and reflect upon student performance in an online assessment tracker.** School leaders provide teachers with feedback on their assessment reflections by offering guidance, recommendations, and resources as needed. The tracker asks teachers to share what they learn from the data and plan ways to address their students’ needs. This document also asks teachers to identify when leadership will see modifications in lessons or units based on the data and reflections. By monitoring and responding to teacher reflections, leaders hold teachers accountable for responding to student performance data. The Rachel Carson High School (RCHS) Professional Development Calendar for 2017 – 2018 identifies a variety of professional development sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays in September and October to support teachers in the reflection and analysis of scholarship data.

- **Teachers and staff establish a culture of high expectations by aligning rubrics and assessments to reflect New York State Regents assessment rubrics, and consistently inform students of their performance levels and credit accumulation through an online grading platform.** Students and parents report that teachers update the platform frequently, so that students are aware of their grades and any missing assignments. Students also report that teachers stay in communication with them and offer support before, during, and after class to help keep them on track.

- **Students shared that they are enrolled in AP and College Now classes and grade twelve students have already begun to apply to college, with some applying for early decision.** Students also shared that the guidance counselors are visiting classes to share information on the college application process. School leadership has also developed partnerships with a variety of City, State and private institutions that support college and career readiness, including the facilitation of onsite science courses in hydroponics and aquaponics that begin in freshman year.
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

Teacher teams consistently analyze data from New York State Regents and teacher created assessments. Distributive leadership structures are in place so that teachers assume leadership roles as department leads, deans, and small group facilitators.

Impact

Data analysis results in improved teacher practice and progress for groups of students. Teacher voice is incorporated into the schoolwide instructional goals and positively affects student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Last year, teacher teams adopted performance task protocols and Looking at Student Work protocols as a way to analyze student data and work samples and implement targeted strategies to support enhanced student performance on New York State Regents assessments. Teachers are continuing these strategies this year across grades and content areas. Strategies include annotation and text analysis to improve comprehension. A comparison of 2016 and 2017 Regents data demonstrates increased performance for all students, including ELLs, in U.S. History and Global, with passing rates in U.S. History and Global both increasing four percentage points.

- The majority of teachers collaborate on grade level and department inquiry teams. Department teams are engaged in inquiry cycles and have developed and responded to focus questions to create 2017 – 2018 Inquiry Action Plans. Faculty share revised lesson plans and Inquiry Action Plans on an online database where administrators and teachers can make revisions and pose questions that impact teacher practice. An ELA action plan demonstrates that teachers analyzed student performance on the ELA Regents examination and determined that the performance by ELLs who have an Individual Education Program (IEP) did not meet expectations in the multiple-choice sections. Teachers concluded that these students would need additional practice with multiple choice questions, as well as new vocabulary strategies to improve their understanding of the language and to enhance their comprehension. Implementation of the strategies is noted in lesson plans and classrooms reflect a focus on academic and content vocabulary with visual supports, word walls, and translated texts and documents.

- Structures are in place for teachers to assume a variety of leadership roles that increase their leadership capacity and provide opportunities for teachers to affect student learning across the school. As department leads, teachers conduct meetings, facilitate professional learning, and provide instructional support for colleagues. A review of the professional calendar, agendas, and minutes provide evidence of weekly grade level and inquiry meetings during which teachers identify modifications, next steps and interventions to better meet diverse students' learning needs. Teacher teams have developed structures that are used across contents to support student learning that include visual supports for vocabulary across departments and modifications for at risk students and students with disabilities. Teachers shared that collaboration with special education teachers on grade level and inquiry teams has led to schoolwide use of a variety of kinesthetic and visual tools to support diverse learners.