Quality Review Report

2017-2018

FDNY - Captain Vernon A. Richard High School For Fire And Life Safety

High school 19K502

400 Pennsylvania Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207

Principal: James Anderson

Dates of Review:
March 28, 2018 - March 29, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Debra Tasioudis
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

FDNY - Captain Vernon A. Richard High School For Fire And Life Safety 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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</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>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

*To what extent does the school...*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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>
</tbody>
</table>

### Area of Celebration

#### 3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations

| Area of Celebration | Well Developed |

### 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>
</tbody>
</table>

### Area of Celebration

#### 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

| Area of Celebration | Well Developed |

### Area of Celebration

#### 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

| Area of Celebration | Well Developed |

### Area of Celebration

#### 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning

| Area of Celebration | Well Developed |

### Area of Celebration

#### 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

| Area of Celebration | Well Developed |
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings

School leaders and staff members effectively communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness and partner with families in a wide range of ways including the College and Career Success Center. There is a culture for learning that systematically communicates college going expectations for students.

Impact

The school supports students and families to ensure student progress. All students receive clear guidance that ensures that students own their educational experience and choices of college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations and student progress through the school's online grading and graduation tracking platform to which students, teachers and families have access. Parents shared that there is also regular outreach on student progress, such as report cards and monthly newsletters and individualized letters from teachers and guidance counselors about student progress.

- On this shared campus, the school has a College and Career Success Center that is run with the support of a community-based organization (CBO), which is open throughout the day, including before and after school, and supports students and their families to understand the college application process, even if the student intends not to go. The CBO and the school also host college entrance exam test preparation, junior and senior parent evenings, and all day opportunities for parents to complete financial aid forms for college funding. School and CBO staff also provide translation service to families, and connect students with legal partnerships with legal firms as necessary. The school’s guidance counselors take the lead in reviewing each student’s graduation status as well as college readiness status, and meets with students individually and in small groups to review student transcripts and report cards. Many of the student interactions are followed up with parent phone calls to ensure messages get home and a three-way relationship (student, parent, staff member) is solidified. The guidance counselors also push-in to classrooms to give presentations about the college and career expectations as well as the actual application process.

- Juniors and seniors at the school have the opportunity to take a series of electives at school that prepares them to go directly into the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY)’s Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) program, upon graduation. The top third of the senior class participates in a yearlong sequence of EMT training led by FDNY staff that include instruction, hands-on technical and fitness training, and leads students into the FDNY summer program where students begin official EMT training and go through certification. Students can choose to do this program or take the electives, thus owning their educational experience as they begin their career path while in high school. Parents also praised the partnership between the FDNY and the high school, and that all alumni can always come back to the FDNY, even if they choose to pursue college or another career path first.

- The school also participates in College Now and Advanced Placement (AP) for All, so that students take AP classes across the campus and take elective courses at a local college, ensuring that students begin preparing for college graduation while still in high school. In a meeting, students shared that they appreciate the opportunities to learn across the campus and at the college. As one student put it, “College is on you from the minute you walk in.” Students and parents were unanimous in their praise for the school’s staff and college prep work, in the classroom and after school in making graduation and college a reality for students.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum

Rating: Developing

Findings

Across grades and subjects, curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills, nor is data based planning reflected to provide access for all students.

Impact

Although a common template is used for unit planning, the curricula and academic tasks do not always emphasize rigor and access for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities so that high levels of student thinking and participation are supported.

Supporting Evidence

- In lesson plans shared during the review, the learning objective sometimes did not match the task, or was written as question, rather than a statement of what students would learn or be able to do at the end of the lesson. In a lesson plan for a Global History lesson, the lesson objective was for students to discuss the concept of détente; the lesson’s task was for students to write a claim and use evidence from the text to describe the historical circumstances that led to the adoption of the policy of détente and its effects on the Cold War. While the lesson objective and task are on the same topic, they require vastly different skills to be practiced during the lesson, though the lesson described only concepts to be explained to students during the lesson.

- In other lesson plans, the rigor of the standard or the learning objective in the lesson did not match the rigor of the task. In a science lesson aligned to the instructional shift of providing text-based answers, the task only asked students to write short sentences, mostly answering low level "right there" questions on asexual reproduction. The instructional shift requires rigorous conversations, grounded in text; the lesson did not include student discussion. In an English lesson plan, the learning objective states, “I will independently read, take my stop and jots/say somethings and complete my literature circle activity.” The standards aligned to the lesson asks that students will analyze the impact of the author’s choices on developing story elements, and in writing, set out a problem, establish multiple viewpoints, introduce a character and create a smooth progression of events. The task for students in the literature circle were simplistic questions such as, “What does the character look like?” or “Who in the current world could you make a connection to?” In other lesson plans reviewed, the lesson objective and the task for students did not align to the rigor of the instructional shift, or promote rigorous habits for students.

- The curricula, including lesson plans and units reflect some planning to provide students with access to the curricula. Many lesson plans shared use a common template that has built in general suggestions for teachers, about ways they might differentiate, such as using flexible grouping, using graphic organizers or learning centers. While some teachers used these methods in their own planning, as did a ninth grade Algebra lesson that included visual aids and an anchor chart, plans seldom reflect refinement using student work and data so that a diversity of learners have access to the task. In units shared, there was little evidence of planning or refinement using student work or data, or planning for students with disabilities or ELLs. Most units also follow a common template that provides for descriptions of standards addressed, big ideas, essential questions, learning objectives and skills, and how student learning would be assessed, but lack the strategies and approaches that show how teachers would ensure that students have access to the curricula. While providing access is commonly a part of the lesson plan, it is seldom a part of unit plans, limiting the planning and refinement of the curricula, so that a diversity of learners are cognitively engaged.
**Additional Finding**

<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 practices and strategies inconsistently include instructional strategies to provide appropriately challenging and rigorous learning opportunities that promote high achievement for a diversity of learners.

**Impact**

There is an uneven demonstration of student thinking, and participation, limiting higher-order thinking skills in discussions and student work products.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across classrooms, there were scaffolds and supports, such as formula sheets, anchor charts, scaffolded note-takers, and models provided by teachers. In an Integrated Co-Teaching Algebra class, one teacher modeled finding and interpreting the axis of symmetry and the y-intercept for students, before sending students off to practice on their own independently. As students worked, both teachers circulated, asking students questions to push their thinking. The second teacher provided additional guidance to students to show the y-intercept to some students, and provided support to other students with specific steps to follow to solve the problems. This purposeful use of supports and scaffolds was not observed in other classes.

- In some classes, these supports helped students demonstrate higher-order thinking; in others, they took the rigor out of the lesson, or limited how students were able to demonstrate their thinking. In an English class, students were asked to develop clear and coherent writing in response to primary source documents, including photographs of Emmett Till and a letter written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Students were given sticky notes to post their response to images, and were given a heavily scaffolded writing prompt, which hindered a potentially rigorous activity for students to produce sentences or paragraphs, instead of writing sentence fragments, or filing in vocabulary words. In their discussions, students shared complex responses to the text and images, but were not provided with space to record their thoughts.

- Lesson plans often included purposeful grouping as a way to provide students with access to the curricula, but the intended student groupings were not in practice in the classroom. In several classes, the teacher led a discussion with the class, leaving room for students to respond with yes or no responses, creating missed opportunities for students to talk with, and support one another. In a Spanish class, the teacher led a whole-class discussion about the race and identity of a famous baseball player, in which students contributed many of their own ideas, and agreed and disagreed with one another about race and identity. After the discussion however, students began working on a low level independent task on demonstrating the use of vocabulary words in sentences. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, the teacher conducted a read aloud for students, and gave them a graphic organizer to complete, but the graphic organizer asked students to briefly retell some key points in the text. The graphic organizer did not require students to refer to the text, or to elaborate their own ideas, beyond what the teacher shared with the class during the read aloud, leading to uneven levels of student thinking being displayed in student work products.
### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers and students use rubrics that are aligned with the school’s curricula. Teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

### Impact

Teachers use assessments and rubrics to provide actionable feedback to students. Checks for understanding during lessons lead to on-the-spot adjustments for students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classes, and in work shared by students in a meeting, teachers use common grading practices, including rubrics, checklists, and written feedback that align with the school’s curricula. In the meeting with students, several pieces of student writing were shared, where students and teachers used a checklist to note strengths in the work and next steps, with in-text notes from the teacher about next steps, thus providing actionable feedback to students. On a literary response to Kobo Abe’s *The Box Man*, the teacher praised the student’s use of characterization, provided in text notes to improve her writing, and gave her a next step of adding more details to her claim to convince the reader of her viewpoint. Similarly, a student shared a piece of writing about Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, in which there were rubric-aligned strengths and next steps, thus providing actionable feedback to student and teacher regarding student achievement. This was typical of grading practices on student writing across the subject areas.

- Students shared that they often receive one-on-one feedback from teachers in conferences after exams that provides guidance about what they missed, particularly in science and math. One student shared a quiz from an AP chemistry class on identifying acids and using a reference table to find different acid constants, with feedback from the teacher that they had discussed in a conference. The student shared that though there was feedback on this, this work was a part of their practice work, and wouldn’t be factored into their final grade, as they were still in the process of learning about the topic. From these conferences, students and teachers shared that the teacher will assign students new lessons, or match students together for support, and provide students with an opportunity to redo their work, or try again for a new grade after a reteach, demonstrating that teachers are providing actionable feedback to students that lead to adjustments in instruction.

- Across classes, teachers used questioning to check for understanding and make adjustments to meet student learning needs, often on-the-spot. Typical of other classes observed, in a math lesson, the teacher used a mid-workshop interruption to guide students through a quick example and discussion about whether or not to use a quadratic equation to solve a problem, and quickly sent students back to work, effectively meeting student-learning needs. Similarly, in a science lesson where students were asked to compare and contrast different types of bedrock, the teacher listened to student groups, and interrupted with additional questions not found in the task to ensure that students were justifying their ideas about bedrock to one another before selecting their answers. This adjustment caused several students to rethink their responses, and allowed others to further explain their thinking to their partner, beyond what was asked for in the task, deepening student thinking and addressing a diversity of needs.
Findings

School leaders use the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to provide teachers with effective feedback from frequent observations. Feedback accurately captures strengths and next steps.

Impact

Feedback to teachers articulates clear expectations and elevates schoolwide instructional practices, such as the workshop model and student discussions, while promoting professional growth and reflection.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders support the development of teachers with effective feedback and next steps from frequent cycles of observation. The school’s *Advance* data and observation reports demonstrate that the school leaders observed the majority of teachers at least three times already at the time of the review. The school leaders have set up an observation cycle, rotating departments and teachers, to ensure that each teacher is observed monthly or bimonthly by an administrator. New teachers are observed more often by coaches, who offer support and additional feedback. Observation reports include feedback that is aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and are prioritized, time-bound next steps. In an observation report shared, one teacher’s next step to move them to the highest rating in designing coherent instruction asks that they allow students to create their own math problems or identify misconceptions through the use of error analysis questions. The feedback to the teacher also made note of student work during the lesson, including student contributions to classroom discussions.

- Feedback to teachers accurately captures strengths and next steps, and articulates clear expectations for teachers that align to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and the school leaders’ instructional beliefs. One observation report shared commends the teacher for the clarity of their directions to students throughout the lesson, and for providing students with opportunities to make connections to previous lessons, and the real world, a stated instructional belief. The next step provided to the teacher asks that the teacher build on open-ended questions by allowing for more wait-time, and opportunities for students to respond to one another, rather than the teacher, when sharing textual evidence. This feedback aligns to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the school’s instructional focus of having students engage in more discussions where students use text-based evidence. This was typical of other feedback provided to teachers in observation reports.

- In a question and answer session, teachers shared that the feedback that they receive from school leaders is helpful in supporting their development and helps them to ensure that their lessons align to the components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the school leaders’ instructional expectations. One teacher shared that the school leaders make it clear that they are expected to use the workshop model to plan lessons, and that the feedback they receive guides her planning. The teacher shared that the feedback conversation, not just the written feedback is helpful in guiding her planning, especially in areas where she is growing, such as promoting student conversations. Another teacher shared that they appreciate that they are observed by both administrators, and the district office, and that there is always a clarity of expectations, particularly around pieces of the workshop model and ensuring that the classroom is student-centered.
### 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**

The majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based collaborations on teams. Committees provide leadership opportunities for teachers.

**Impact**

Teacher teams promote the achievement of school goals and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers. Teachers have a key voice in decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The majority of teachers meet in department teams where teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations, focused on ensuring that their units and instruction are aligned to the Common Core, and promote the school’s goal of increasing rigor across the subject areas. In a math department meeting observed, teachers looked at a few pieces of student work, describing what the student work revealed about student thinking in problem solving. Teachers also took a step further to interpret student thinking, identifying what skills the students mastered, and what they were still working on. Teachers also used the New York State math exam rubric to discuss student strengths and areas for improvement, as well as grading practices, for this set of problems, and others in their units. Teachers then turned their discussion to next steps for teachers, including current and possible future approaches to teaching functional equations. Teachers focused their attention on strategies, such as annotation, or increasing the amount of variables in a problem to ensure that student thinking is clear and rigor is also promoted in the work.

- As the teacher team met, teachers took notes on the student work, next steps for students and teachers in light of their inquiry, and teaching strategies to implement next. One teacher shared that they individually implement the strategies that are discussed in the their own classrooms, and change their future lesson plans based on the team discussions. While this was not always evident in the lesson plans shared at the meeting, there was some evidence of plans to reteach content, a stated next step during the meeting. During the meeting, teachers exchanged strategies and supports, such as anchor charts, or problem solving techniques, and several shared that they would add these new strategies to their teaching repertoire, strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers.

- In a separate meeting, teachers shared that there are many ways that teachers can have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. There are many teacher-led committees at the school, such as the Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) committee that makes decisions about student assessment and the alignment of the school’s curricula to assessments. In addition to the MoSL team, teachers also lead the AP for All team that ensures that students have opportunities to take AP exams across the campus. A teacher leader from the team shared that they were able to create a summer bridge class for students this year, so that many of the freshman were able to come in during the summer and get a head start in preparing for AP English and math. As the teacher stated, “I love knowing that I can write a proposal and they work with us to make it happen. It is a great strength of the school.” There is also an FDNY committee that works to ensure that the school’s curricula align to the school’s partnership with the FDNY and makes connections to the content of the FDNY electives. Teachers shared that they appreciate getting the opportunity to take on these leadership roles, and getting to know the ins and outs of administrative work.