Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Talent Unlimited High School
High School 02M519
317 East 67 Street
Manhattan
NY 10065

Principal: Yeou Jey Vasconcelos

Dates of Review:
February 14, 2018 - February 15, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Kimberly Bradley
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

Talent Unlimited High School serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</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>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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

The school’s approach to discipline and social-emotional support results in a safe environment that is conducive to student learning. Structures are in place, including the use of restorative circles and modules, so that each student is known well by at least one adult.

Impact

Interventions, routines, and supports help students learn positive behaviors that result in a safe environment and an inclusive school culture that welcome student voice and supports student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- To ensure a safe environment the school maintains an anecdotal log that is monitored by the administrative team. This log lists a description of the individual incident, who responded to the incident, and the type of response, such as a phone call home or conversations with the student or students involved. As part of their schedule, students participate in modules that rotate every six weeks and focus on a variety of topics including college and career information, academic support in content areas, financial management and those designed to relieve stress and teach de-escalation techniques. Modules for this year have included yoga and meditation. Students commented that participation in modules helps them develop coping mechanisms and provide an opportunity to interact with students from all majors across the school. Students also commented that communication through the student government and school activities has improved this year. Prompt responses to incidents and social emotional modules support students and faculty in creating a respectful and inclusive learning environment.

- The school has established a partnership with a community based organization that provided restorative circle training for all staff at the beginning of this year. Training included the facilitation of a school wide restorative circles curriculum that focuses on reflection, students’ personal identity and building community. Student schedules provide evidence that all freshmen participate in weekly restorative circles. School faculty and staff also use restorative circles when mediating conflict between students. Students reported that through restorative circles, they have developed skills to handle difficult situations with other students. Teachers reported that through circles they are able to proactively deal with student concerns and respond to students in crisis sooner. Restorative circles connect freshman and other students with faculty so that each student is known well by at least one adult.

- Grade level teams meet on a regular basis and review the progress of the students on their grade. Each teacher identifies five students at risk for not staying on track for graduation or in the lowest third of the class. Teams monitor student performance and attendance for these students throughout the year. Teachers also conduct student-specific classroom observations focusing on the five at risk students and record the students’ behavior and teacher responses to student behaviors. Teams then share notes to identify and implement strategies to support these students. As a result, some students are showing improvement in attendance and credit accumulation. In addition, Students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have both a special education case manager and a general education case manager that tracks the progress of the students assigned to their case load. The school’s college counselor tracks and individually meets with each student and records on the diploma requirement worksheet the student’s progress toward graduation and a Regents diploma. Progress monitoring, guidance and advisement supports are in place to support the needs of all students.
Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations through grade level and department teams that consistently analyze data and student work. However, teams have yet to systematically analyze key elements of teacher work.

Impact

Although teacher collaborations are strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers and leading to progress toward goals for groups of students, team practices have yet to result in schoolwide instructional coherence or mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- During an English Language Arts inquiry meeting, teachers analyzed student responses on the January 2018 Common Core English Regents. In particular, they examined multiple choice questions that the majority of students answered incorrectly and brainstormed what the question was explicitly and implicitly assessing. Members of the team identified that students might not be familiar with the language in the question and that the answer choices were very similar. Teachers also identified that students needed to find textual evidence in order to answer the question and brainstormed strategies to support students with this type of question and academic vocabulary. Team members participated in a carousel activity, sharing low, medium, and high level examples of student work from an eleventh grade English class assignment that focused on textual analysis of the poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Teachers provided warm and cool feedback on student strengths and areas of growth. A review of team notes provides evidence that teams across contents and grade levels analyze student work to develop targeted strategies to implement in classrooms. However, there was little evidence that teams are strategically examining their own practices, hindering opportunities for shared improvements in practices schoolwide.

- Grade level and department level inquiry teams meet weekly with the lead teachers identified for each grade level and department team. Every other week, the principal meets with the grade level lead teachers, and the assistant principal meets with the department lead teachers to set the agenda for the next two grade level and department level meetings. Leaders workshop team tasks, support teachers in practicing the facilitation of the meeting and share best practices with teacher leaders. Other teams that meet to support student progress include the data team, the guidance team, and the special education team. This year grade level teams are addressing relationship building, with a focus on students in the lowest third. A review of agendas and minutes show that team meetings focus on instructional design, curriculum planning, and the design and review of assessments to inform instruction, but inconsistently identify a clear alignment with schoolwide instructional goals, hindering opportunities for coherence across teams.

- With support from the school’s data team, teachers learned data analysis techniques at the beginning of the school year. They reviewed Regents exam item analysis reports, the Advanced Placement (AP) instructional planning report, and the Arts Commencement Examination results and developed instructional goals based on the analysis of these data. Departments also used this data at the beginning of the year when examining the Common Core Learning Standards and identifying specific standards to focus on across grade levels. As a result of the focus on data analysis, the instructional capacity of teachers has grown, as shown by improved student performance on the literacy analysis multiple choice questions on the January 2018 Common Core English Regents.
Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Curricula promote rigorous habits and higher order skills for students in the majority of grades and subjects across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricular documents reveals alignment to the Common Core and New York State content standards, where applicable, as well as the integration of the instructional shifts across grade and content areas. Some of the instructional shifts in English include citing specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, determining the central ideas of a primary or secondary source, and determining the meaning of words or phrases as they are used in a text. For example, in the curriculum map for twelfth grade English Language Arts, one of the instructional goals states, “Writing an analysis of a literary text from close reading that develops a meaning of the work as whole using advanced literary techniques and textual evidence, including the nuances in the author’s use of language, articulating the integration of the instructional shifts.” Some instructional shifts in math include solving multistep linear and quadratic equations, graphing functions, close reading skills, and using visuals and graphs as tools to solve problems. Evidence of this integration was found in a course syllabus and curriculum map for pre-calculus.

- Evaluation of curricular documents demonstrated evidence of providing support for attaining higher level skills for a variety of student learning needs, including advanced learners and students with disabilities. Unit and lesson plans for Geometry state that students ready to move on to more challenging problems will have access to alternate review sheets, that students who qualify for extended time are given modified exams to allow for all concepts to be assessed, and that students can use class notes and word walls to assist them in the completion of the assignment. In a living environment lesson, plans stated that students will work with an elbow partner as they read a piece of text about genetic expression and discuss what they saw, thought and wondered, fostering collaboration. The lesson plan stated that students were seated heterogeneously by unit exam performance and some of the strategies used to ensure engagement with rigorous academic tasks included graphic organizers and think-pair-share.

- Aims and learning goals in unit and lesson plans emphasize higher-order thinking skills. The learning goals in an English unit stated, “Students will be able to identify and discuss the central elements of Enlightenment, Romanticism and the distinguishing elements of Mary Shelly’s biographical summary.” The learning objective in a chemistry lesson stated, “By the end of the lesson students will be able to use the concept of the mole and Avogadro’s number to convert between moles and particles.” Consequently, the development of aims and learning goals in addition to academic tasks in unit and lesson plans emphasizes higher-order thinking skills.
Additional Finding

### Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy

#### Rating: Proficient

## Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs, informed by the instructional shifts, that fosters higher order-thinking with a focus on vocabulary development and annotation. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula, allowing most students to be engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.

## Impact

All learners demonstrate high levels of thinking and engagement, resulting in meaningful work products. Alignment to the instructional shifts supports the production of meaningful work products that reflect multiple entry points that engage learners.

## Supporting Evidence

- Teachers provide opportunities for students to utilize strategies such as annotation and the development of academic vocabulary to access and engage with content specific texts. In a living environment class, students worked with partners using the comment, question, and underline protocol to annotate a text about DNA coding. For each paragraph, students wrote a comment in the column on the right side of the text about the main idea and underlined the supporting evidence in the text. As students were reading and annotating, they had access to a guided-notes outline and a word bank tool with terms and concepts related to DNA structure and function that helped students comprehend the text.

- In a geometry class, the two co-teachers designed different versions of the same activity for a lesson on triangle similarity theorems. Students who had demonstrated mastery on previous work in the unit were given an alternate set of review problems to work on with their assigned partners as an extension of the previous lesson. Students who needed additional practice based on the teachers’ evaluation of their work were partnered with a student who also needed extended time to practice mastery. The two teachers circulated around the room as the student pairs worked on their assigned problems, and students were directed to the geometry word wall or theorem cards located on the side wall of the classroom if students needed additional vocabulary support. The practices seen in this lesson reflect the use of multiple entry points to provide all learners with appropriately challenging tasks.

- In a global studies class, students used the HIPPOS historical source analysis strategy to identify the historical context, intended audience, point of view, purpose, outside information, and so what? as they annotated and analyzed Truman’s Potsdam Conference and Churchill’s Iron Curtain speeches. They used a graphic organizer to annotate the primary source documents and recorded their responses to the prompts on the organizer. Students first worked individually and then worked with a partner to share their responses. Both teachers monitored the progress of students as they circulated through the classroom. Teaching practices demonstrate the school’s belief that students work best when working in pairs or small groups and utilizing a variety of strategies and protocols when engaging with challenging tasks.
### Additional Finding

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

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers provide students with actionable feedback and opportunities to self-assess their own learning to check for understanding and address the learning needs of students.

**Impact**

Use of teacher feedback and student reflection and self-assessment inform and result in effective lesson adjustments.

**Supporting Evidence**

- In a ninth grade English lesson, students worked in pairs and used a student-created rubric that defined criteria for students to use to self and peer assess the odes they had written. Students provided written feedback to their partners, describing what the partner did well and what they needed to work on as they revised their odes. Students also cited specific examples from their partner’s writing and specific language from the rubric in their written feedback. As part of the closure of the lesson, students were asked to reflect on the feedback provided by their partner, listing two specific examples of how the peer review was helpful and developing one goal for their final draft of the ode based on the peer feedback.

- Across classrooms, student work products showed teacher-written actionable feedback. Some examples included, “Good job explaining context of each doc, but you’re missing the other parts, thesis, broader context,” “Use this space. Change increments for axis. Title the lab. Key?” and “Good question! Include what we are learning in class! Include how day/night is caused by rotation!” An examination of rubrics showed an alignment to the school's curricula. A rubric from Earth science outlined the categories on which the final student project would be evaluated, including completion, accuracy, creativity, and neatness. An essay rubric from Advanced Placement English Literature provided a checklist of attributes that the essay needed to include for a particular score.

- In examining one instance of student work, students in an Earth science class were asked during their warm-up to list three feelings they had at that time, to circle the strongest feeling, and describe why they thought they were feeling that way. Students were also asked to describe a glow of which they were most proud and a grow of what they wanted to change today. An example of a student response was, “We got most of the info. Include some more info.” During a geometry lesson, the two co-teachers rotated throughout the classroom as students worked in pairs and trios as they discussed and applied their understanding of the triangle similarity theorem. The co-teachers guided students to refer to their notes or theorem cards posted in the classroom. The use of ongoing checks for understanding and opportunities for student self-assessment and reflection result in effective lesson adjustments.
### 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 and provide training and professional development to the whole staff in alignment with the elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders and staff also communicate with families about school expectations.

**Impact**

School leaders’ prompt written feedback and constant communication have increased teachers’ understanding and awareness of the expectations for them around teaching and learning. Communication with families through Pupil Path and school newsletters provides opportunities for them to understand their children’s progress toward meeting standards.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The principal uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching to inform instructional practices and communicates expectations regularly to teachers and staff via email, memoranda, and individual and group teacher conferences. The principal also provides opportunities for professional development, such as Congruent Communication and work with Morningside Center on Restorative Circles, which communicates high expectations with a focus on explicit and implicit instruction and student ownership for learning. The principal and assistant principals visit classrooms together and are working on calibrating their ratings and feedback to teachers. Dates of classroom visits and teacher feedback are recorded in an observation log.

- School leaders support teachers in understanding their instructional expectations by conducting classroom walk-throughs that are followed up by verbal or written feedback on what was observed, including identifying next steps and what school leaders will be looking for during their next visit. Teachers also develop their initial planning conference goals at the beginning of the year, and observation reports from Advance demonstrate feedback and next steps for teachers. Teachers record their goals on the teacher goal tracker and reflect on their progress throughout the year. One teacher goal states, “Students will improve their ability to apply central ideas from informational text towards thematic connections with literary text.”

- Families learn about school expectations and requirements through school newsletters, emails, and meetings. One newsletter included information from the college office that outlines the city, state and national exams that students need to take during their four years in high school and provides suggestions for ways parents can support their students across each year. Families also communicated during the parent meeting that they check the academic progress of their children online through Pupil Path, and most parents check the grades and attendance of their children on a weekly basis. Parents also noted that class contracts and expectations sent home at the beginning of the year, in addition to ongoing phone calls and emails from staff members throughout the year, assist in monitoring the academic and social-emotional progress of their children. Moreover, parents commented that the school has improved in communicating about Regents requirements and the college entrance and audition process through parent-teacher association meetings, school leadership team meetings, curriculum nights, and parent-teacher conferences.