Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Independence High School
High school 02M544
850 10Th Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10019

Principal: Ron Smolkin

Dates of Review:
February 27, 2018 - February 28, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Edward Hazen
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

Independence High School serves students in grade 9 through grade 11. 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></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>
</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>
</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>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<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>1.3 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>
</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>
<td>Well Developed</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>
</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by the school’s belief of involving students in their own learning. Structures are in place to allow staff, students, and families to collaborate in addressing all students’ academic and social-emotional needs and to monitor their own progress.

#### Impact

The school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect that contributes to a positive and personalized learning environment in which students are well known by adults, resulting in social-emotional learning that supports student and adult growth and positively impacts their academic and personal behaviors.

#### Supporting Evidence

- The school’s approach to culture-building and promoting an inclusive and positive school environment that is conducive to learning is rooted in its theory of action of supporting the social emotional growth of students so that they can be successful academically. School leaders and staff members reported their belief that students are most likely to be successful and achieve at the highest level when they are partners in their learning. Students reported that they feel like they are part of a community and they are frequently asked for their input to make decisions that impact school improvement efforts through surveys and conversations in restorative circles. For example, students reported that they requested that the school leaders reconsider the flipped classroom model because it was adversely affecting student attendance and grades. The request was granted by the school leadership team. Similarly, students were included in the decision to move lunch to the end of the school day to provide them with the opportunity to report to work earlier in the day.

- The school has a restorative practices program in place that allows each student to get to know staff members very well through a variety of restorative discussion circles that include social and academic support, community building, and conflict resolution. Further, the school partners with a Community Based Organization (CBO) to ensure that each student is assigned to an advocate who also serves as a mentor to encourage them to attend school every day and maintain a positive attitude. The CBO also provides advisement and supports students with passing classes, attendance, finding internships, and post-secondary planning. Students report that in addition to meeting regularly with staff, they frequently use the online grade reporting system that allows them to monitor their progress toward passing their classes and credit accumulation and therefore their path toward graduation.

- There are structures in place to promote regular daily attendance and a system to intervene for students who are at-risk of becoming chronically tardy or absent. To monitor regular daily attendance, school leaders adopted software that tracks attendance in real time thereby allowing for immediate intervention by staff members. Similarly, the principal worked with students to create an absenteeism committee called “Keep it Lit” that monitors daily attendance and has students encourage their peers to attend school every day. The principal hosts a weekly “Friday Lit Rewards” social event to celebrate students with perfect attendance. Students reported that the systems and structures that are in place have resulted in improved daily attendance and expressed appreciation for the on-site day care that they feel has helped many students report to school every day on time. This was evidenced by a 2 percent increase from 2015-16 to 2016-2017 in the percentage of students with a 90 percent or better attendance rate.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: Proficient |

Findings

Across grades and courses, teachers use common assessment data to adjust to curricula and instruction. Rubrics are created that align with the curricula and Regents assessments across grades and disciplines.

Impact

The use of rubrics allows teachers to provide effective feedback to students regarding their progress and performance. Common assessment data is used to assess students’ progress toward meeting the standards and inform revisions made to the curricula and pedagogy.

Supporting Evidence

- Across disciplines and grade levels, teachers use common assessments and rubrics that align to the grade-level curricula, Common Core Learning Standards, and content standards. In Regents-bearing classes, teachers align rubrics to the Regents assessments. Students stated that the use of exemplars in conjunction with teacher and peer feedback has helped improve their writing, and they feel that it is preparing them for their Regents exams. However, a review of student work indicated that the quality of actionable feedback with next steps to improve their work varied across grades and disciplines. Furthermore, students reported that the level of meaningful feedback is dependent upon the class.

- Across departments, teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward meeting the standards, to identify trends in student achievement, and to make adjustments to curricula and pedagogy. For example, after reviewing Regents and common benchmark assessment data, a decision was made to adopt a common argumentative essay rubric to create consistency in teaching and assessing student writing across grades and subjects in grades nine through twelve. Similarly, after an analysis of data indicated that students inconsistently annotated texts, all departments worked collaboratively to develop a schoolwide definition of annotation and each department created its own content-specific system of annotating text to improve student achievement on the Regents exams.

- To promote the school’s philosophy of using data to personalize and differentiate instruction, and to provide students with opportunities to work toward mastery of a skill, school leaders and faculty created a schoolwide benchmark assessment calendar. There are four benchmarks days per trimester during which each teacher completes a reflection that identifies trends in student benchmark data and adjustments that will be made to the curriculum and instruction accordingly, including the instructional interventions that will be employed to support struggling students. Teachers write follow up reflections to determine whether or not their instructional interventions were successful. Similarly, teacher teams meet twice a month to analyze the data and collaboratively determine the effectiveness of the interventions.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum
Rating: Proficient

Findings

There is a structure in place to ensure alignment of the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and to plan rigorous academic tasks for all learners.

Impact

The curricula reflect planning for academic tasks and discourse with rigorous habits that build coherence across departments and support college and career readiness for students with diverse learning needs. However, the vast majority of teachers have yet to strategically plan higher level cognitive tasks so that all students must consistently demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curriculum documents across grades and subjects indicates evidence of teacher departmental teamwork to integrate the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts in English Language Arts (ELA), math, social studies, and science. Across content areas and grade levels, students are required to arrive at an informed decision based on the lesson’s ‘aim’ or learning objective and to cite supporting textual evidence to justify their stance on an issue when making a claim. Inquiry teams from each department plan units of study that incorporate reading and annotation of complex texts to engage students in text-based discussions and writing from sources to make arguments, and to promote the adoption of academic vocabulary. To foster higher levels of classroom discussion, teachers have identified prompts that encourage accountable talk and the inclusion of academic vocabulary and have embedded them into many of their lesson plans to build coherence across disciplines. Examples include talking prompts to help students respectfully disagree and to build upon one another’s thoughts and sentence starters and frames and annotation strategies to support students’ thinking and writing from sources.

- Staff members meet weekly to collaboratively work in teams to review and revise curriculum documents and lesson plans to ensure accessibility for all students. Based on the analysis of student work samples and assessment data, including formative classroom assessments or exit tickets, common benchmark assessments and Regents exam results, teachers adjust lesson plans and curricula to include supports such as scaffolds and differentiated tasks. School leaders conduct instructional walks and curriculum document reviews and meet with teams looking for the impact of the grade level and departmental teamwork, such as the inclusion of an aim and differentiated academic tasks when planning lessons so that students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) are supported.

- A review of meeting minutes and agendas indicates that most departmental team meetings focus on creating lessons that encourage student-centered conversations, providing whole-class and individualized supports that allow multiple access points into the lesson through differentiation of tasks and planning for leveled student grouping. Teachers use data to create intervention plans for students who struggle and revisit interventions that are put in place to assess students’ progress toward meeting benchmarks. Further, teachers write reflections on their practice to document which interventions were effective in supporting English Language Learners, students with disabilities and struggling students so that best practices can be emulated across classes. Thus, interventions require reflection on the part of teachers and often result in shifts in pedagogy and awareness of student misconceptions. However, a review of lesson plans indicates that the vast majority of teachers are not yet strategically embedding these practices in a coherent way across classes to ensure that all students, including the ELLs and students with disabilities must demonstrate their thinking.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

Teaching strategies align to the schoolwide goal of providing small group instruction and multiple entry points through the use of scaffolds for all learners to participate in academic tasks and discussion.

Impact

Scaffolds and differentiated tasks result in students' engaging in high levels of thinking and discussion. Across classrooms, instructional practices align to the shared beliefs about how students learn best.

Supporting Evidence

- In most classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the school's articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. One of the overarching schoolwide beliefs is that all lessons must have a lesson target or “aim” displayed and shared with students, with the expectation that it should be revisited during the lesson. Pedagogy must also engage students in purposeful academic tasks and authentic discourse which emphasize high levels of rigor to promote college and career ready skills. School leaders and teachers identified purposeful small group instruction and discussion protocols such as think-pair-share and turn-and-talk as the best way to align instructional practices to the schoolwide goal. These models and protocols were observed being utilized across classrooms and grade levels.

- Across classes, students were observed participating in group and partner discussions utilizing accountable talk protocols to support students and keep them engaged in purposeful conversations. Similar instructional strategies and scaffolds were used to provide entry points into the lesson in other classes to engage students in appropriately challenging tasks. For example, in an English Language Arts (ELA) class, the teacher explicitly modeled how to make observations about a character’s transition in a book while annotating the text and citing details. For independent practice, students were directed to cite textual evidence to determine whether the main character in *Rite of Passage* was in the transition or incorporation stage. To support the varied levels in the class, the teachers grouped students by ability and provided them with differentiated packets that included graphic organizers.

- In an eleventh-grade United States history class, students were required to use a think-see-wonder gallery walk protocol to analyze several United States government-created World War II era posters to make inferences and draw conclusions about the message the poster was trying to convey to the American people. Students were placed in groups that were determined by their achievement level on their most recent classroom assessment and provided with a graphic organizer as a scaffold. The teacher monitored students' conversations while taking discussion participation progress notes on a clipboard and supporting students' conversation as needed. Students were observed making high-level inferences such as “I think most women today would find that poster offensive because it implies that they have to ask their husband’s permission to go to work.”
Findings
The school leaders and faculty consistently communicate high expectations to students and their families. A culture for learning that promotes student success is maintained and communicated across the school community.

Impact
Systems of accountability for students and partnerships with families ensure that all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities and their families are aware of their progress toward meeting personal and academic goals that lead to a path to graduation and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have structures in place to communicate high expectations to students and their families that lead to college and career readiness for their children. Parents reported that the communication between school and home is excellent. Parents further reported receiving consistent student progress updates from the school through a variety of means, including face-to-face meetings with teachers, counselors and school leaders. Parents noted that the school has an online grade reporting system that allows students to monitor their progress in their classes and their credit accumulation. Students reported that in addition to using the online system, they frequently visit the school data board that serves as a visual for them to monitor their pathway to graduation. Students were observed visiting the data board to track their progress during the school visitation.

- Once students are assigned to an advocate; they meet one-on-one with them to set goals and expectations and to determine a pathway and timeline toward achieving them. Advocates then partner with families to jointly support students in meeting their expectations by ensuring that they are passing their classes and attending daily. Parents and students stated that their partnership with advocates has resulted in them being prepared for college and career through post-secondary planning and placement in internships.

- Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students, and provide feedback and advisement so that students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level. When students enroll in the school, guidance counselors meet with them and their parents to establish a projected graduation date and plan backwards to systematically meet their goal. Additionally, students receive ongoing advisement through regular progress monitoring with guidance. Parents reported that these supports have resulted in their children taking ownership of their learning. One parent noted that despite a ninety-minute commute to the school, her son received a perfect attendance award for the 2016-2017 school year because he had become intrinsically motivated to meet the expectations set jointly with his advisors. This is also evidenced by a 12 percent increase in the Transfer School Graduation Rate from 37 percent in 2015 to 49 percent in 2017.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based collaborations that align to the school goals and promote implementation of the instructional shifts across disciplines.

Impact

Across grades and departments, teacher teams’ use of a structured protocol to analyze data and student work products has resulted in improvements in the implementation of the Common Core and instructional shifts as well as strengthened teacher instructional capacity and improved student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams use a structured protocol to review student work and analyze assessment data to make curricular and lesson plan changes that align to the schoolwide goal of creating student-centered lessons. Teachers collaborate to create rigorous lessons that have students engage in purposeful academic tasks and authentic discourse, emphasizing high levels of thinking to promote college and career readiness. The departmental teams engage in inquiry work to examine the impact of specific instructional strategies on student achievement. After changes are made to curriculum documents and lesson plans and strategies are implemented in classroom practice, the teams reconvene to assess which strategies had an impact on student learning. Teaching practices and interventions that are identified as effective in addressing a gap in achievement are then shared across grades and content areas. For instance, the common instructional practice of utilizing a learning target for every lesson embodies the school’s vision of ensuring that the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts are being implemented across grade levels and departments. As a result, students are better able to cite textual details to support a claim or argument.

- Teachers reported that as a result of common collaboration time, there has been a positive impact on their professional practice and student learning as they have time to share and discuss specific pedagogical strategies and practices that can improve student engagement. Teachers reported analyzing formal as well as informal assessments, such as exit tickets and benchmark assessments, to determine how high levels of classroom discussion informed students’ stances on a topic of debate, impacting their ability to back their claims with sufficient supporting textual evidence. Teachers further noted that as teacher teams added supports for students and pushed them to use academic language and accountable talk, students responded positively and became comfortable taking risks in class, thereby strengthening their progress toward the schoolwide vision of increasing student discourse in all classrooms.

- Teacher teams meet regularly to analyze assessment data from a variety of sources, including exit tickets, class participation notes, and formal and mock New York State Regents exams. School leaders and teachers also administer benchmark assessments in each content area four times per year to provide teachers and teacher teams with baseline data to inform changes to curricula and instruction and to plan supports for students they are focused on to close the achievement gap. Likewise, the data is used to create instructional groups and provide targeted interventions for struggling students. These practices have resulted in an increase in the graduation rate from 37 percent in 2015 to 49 percent in 2017.