Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Epic High School - South
High school 27Q314
121-10 Rockaway Boulevard
Queens
NY 11420

Principal: Subhas Mohan

Dates of Review:
May 30, 2018 - May 31, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Robin Posner
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

Epic High School - South 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>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>Area of Focus</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>
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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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</table>

### Systems for Improvement

To what extent does the school...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>
</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>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

A highly supportive and extended family culture is evident throughout the school. There is a nurturing and personal learning climate with effective social and emotional structures in place.

Impact

Students are adopting effective academic and personal behaviors and student voice is meaningfully involved in school improvement efforts.

Supporting Evidence

- Across all grades and throughout each classroom a warm and nurturing environment is apparent. All staff members respect students and families and this was confirmed in the conversations conducted with parents and students. Several adults, including school leaders who demonstrate positive rapport with students, know all students. Both parents and students believe that school leaders and staff care deeply about the students and have high expectations for them. For example, students shared work products and were eager to explain how the support they receive from their teachers helps them to be a better student. Students also shared that they have several adults that they can go to if they need help, whether it is involves academic or social-emotional support.

- The mantra of the school is the incorporation of a safe and healthy learning environment for all students. The principal shared the belief that giving students a voice fosters confidence and comfort with taking risks. Students stated that they enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They feel they can speak to any adult in the building. Student opinion is taken seriously. Data from the student government indicated that students wanted the grading plan redone because they felt that tests scores were too high a criteria. Students took the initiative to organize a team for student advocacy and the creation of a grading policy to meet their needs. Students met with teachers and leaders and advocated for the project-based learning projects to be weighted as much as assessments. As a result, the grading policy was changed. Additionally, student government advocated for seniors to be allowed to leave the school building for lunch. They suggested that only seniors in good standing and on track be afforded this privilege and that policy was also instituted. Student voice was also part of the decision to change the school session times.

- The school has structures in place to ensure that students' social-emotional learning needs are well met. The guidance counselors, deans and teachers work as a team to support students' social-emotional needs through an advisory program that has a restorative justice and social emotional curriculum as its center. This enables students to learn language and vocabulary cues to help them express their feelings, frustrations and learn how to positively complement each other. The positive impact of this curriculum is evident. There has been a ten percent decrease in suspensions across the board in 2017-18. The parent coordinator, teachers and guidance staff facilitate various workshops, such as homework help to better support and partner with parents to aid in academic and social-emotional achievement. The school has extensive after-school programs such as test prep programs and arts enrichment programs. Parents readily share their satisfaction with the school's administration and faculty. Students are welcomed warmly in the morning, reminding them of the communal inclusivity of their school.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: Developing |

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs that students learn best when they are engaged in rigorous and personalized learning. Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

There is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and inconsistent demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Administration and staff believe that students learn best from experience and should be given sufficient time on task, opportunities to work collaboratively, and to make connections to the learning. Administration and staff focus on instructional strategies that provide students with opportunities to talk about their learning with each other, including use of accountable talk stems in discussions using think-pair-share, turn-and-talk, and small group work activities. In a math class, students were seated in groups of four and asked to complete the do now as a group, with one person at a time sharing their noticings and wonderings and everyone jotting down notes. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class students were asked to think-pair-share on why they thought Hamlet decided to put on a play to reenact his father’s death.

- There were some instances where student voice was evident. In an EMT class, students worked cooperatively in groups to perform CPR on adult and baby mannequins. Each student had a role and asked each other questions and supported each other’s roles. When asked if they enjoy this class students responded unanimously, “I love learning CPR!” In an ELA class, students had the opportunity to work in groups to figure out the central ideas in their book club groups. Yet since the activity, which was new to students, was not explicitly modeled, many students were not effective in providing their peers with supportive and actionable feedback. In a sociology class, students were tasked with viewing photos and completing a graphic organizer independently with teacher support as needed. There was no opportunity for rich student discussion or student to student interactions. Students who finished early were instructed to walk around and help other struggling students. In an algebra class, students were instructed to work in groups, but most students worked independently. As the teacher met with students in one group, only the teacher’s voice was heard. Similarly, in another ELA class, the teacher moved from group to group to help students understand the task. She provided examples and leading low-level questions, which students answered with one word or a nod. All students were completing the same graphic organizer with no differentiation or extension for English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities or high performers, leading to students not being engaged with the task.

- A geometry class provided groups with tiered tasks and heterogeneous groupings designed to support the language ability of ELLs in the class. This was unevenly observed in other classes. In an ELA class, the teacher assigned students leveled books for different reading levels, without student choice to self-select. Although there were some questions that represented higher levels of Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK), students were only engaged with the teacher, and there were few opportunities for students-to-student discourse. In an ELA class, students worked on a differentiated quick write; however, the entry points for ELLs were missing and those students were unable to begin without additional teacher support. In a living environment class, students were using a tool that helps them determine multiple choice strategies but as the tool was newly introduced, there were students struggling. Neither these students nor the fast finishers were provided with the supports to extend or complete the activity.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
School leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions to align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards. Faculty plan and revise curricula and academic tasks using student work.

Impact
The alignment of the ELA and math curricula from grade nine to grade twelve builds coherence across the grades. Revisions to tasks provide access for a diversity of learners and engage all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership makes purposeful decisions to ensure the alignment of the curriculum to Common Core and content standards. The decision was made by school leadership to fully integrate the EngageNY math and ELA curricula. This adjustment helps build coherence in the ELA and math curricula from grade nine to grade twelve since all teachers are using this curriculum and it spirals up through grades and content areas. Curriculum maps and unit plans reviewed across content areas provide evidence of alignment to Common Core. Teachers design and review learning opportunities, with the purpose to strengthen the connection between vocabulary development, reading and writing, as well as content knowledge across all curricula areas. Across lessons, including integrated co-teaching and general education classes, there is evidence of the instructional shifts, specifically finding text-based answers, vocabulary use, writing from different sources, fluency and deep understanding. For example, students in an algebra class are asked to simply equations using the order of operations and number properties. In an ELA unit plan on Shakespeare students are asked to determine the central ideas and theme of the text and to provide multiple examples of text-based evidence to support their claim.

- Unit plans are written to support all learners including ELLs and students with disabilities. For example, in a geometry unit plan, there is additional support through videos and step by step instructions, verbally or on a personalized infographic. In an ELA unit plan on identifying key ideas and details in literature, differentiation is provided through tiered questions, images, translated texts and graphic organizers. Teachers use data from assessments and checks for understanding like exit slips to determine what changes need to be made to curricula to support learners. For example, many students including low performers, ELLs and students with disabilities were receiving very few points on assessments, particularly in math and science. Lesson plans and unit plans were changed to provide these students with multiple opportunities to recognize and internalize the task and to provide students with multiple resources across modalities like video clips and translated texts.

- Common language is used among staff and the modeling of this practice ensures students are building their English Language Arts and math academic vocabulary. Unit plans in literacy, writing, and math illustrate multiple ways to present academic tasks with a variety of entry points for all students. For example, one lesson plan called for students to cite evidence from a text and use graphic organizers and a sight word list to accomplish their assignments. Another lesson plan in a science class asked students to research, hypothesize and debate specific human reactions and their impact on the environment. All students were actively engaged as they worked in mixed ability groups with a variety of supports available to support all learners.
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 content-specific rubrics and grading policies that are aligned with the curricula. Teachers and staff use baseline, benchmark, and pre- and post-unit assessment data to determine student progress toward goals.

Impact

Teachers use feedback from assessment data and student work to make adjustments to curricula and instruction and provide students with actionable feedback on their academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and content areas, teachers use content- and genre-specific rubrics that align to the curricula. Rubrics assess student performance on a zero to four or zero to three scale dependent upon curricula being assessed. Rubrics for writing align to the one to three grading scale with an overall score of three being on grade level standard performance. In math, a three-point holistic rubric is used with three points being given for a complete and correct answer. Feedback in the form of glows, grows and actionable next steps is given. Criteria on the ELA rubric includes citing relevant text-based details and using at least one direct quote from the text to support student thinking. Criteria on a math rubric on parallelogram analysis includes asking for students to demonstrate the correct use of the distance formula and to correctly complete the calculation.

- Teachers use data from assessments and student work to provide students with actionable feedback verbally and in notes and revisions to student work. Teachers hold one-on-one conferences with students to review their work and provide feedback to students. Students use conference goals to implement new strategies in their work. A review of student work provided evidence that most students apply teacher recommended strategies and next steps in their work. Students reported that teachers follow up to see if it is implemented in later assignments. A student shared that she got specific feedback on an ELA assignment to ensure that she goes in-depth when analyzing a text by using more text-based evidence to support her thinking. The student shared the next assignment with me and showed me where the teacher had highlighted where she successfully implemented this feedback. There was also a glow on the rubric about it. The student stated, “This feedback has helped me not only in ELA, but in my writing across content areas and other teachers have given me positive feedback on this too."

- Leadership and faculty use baseline, benchmark, and pre- and post-unit assessment data to determine student progress toward goals. Teachers use beginning, middle, and end-of-year math assessments, ELA performance assessments, and on-demand writing assessments to monitor progress toward goals in ELA and math. A review of unit and lesson plans demonstrated that teachers use common assessment data to make adjustments to curricula and revise lesson plans. This year, teachers have revised the ELA curricula to include additional lessons on evidence based writing. Lesson plans reviewed highlight student assignment to tiered instructional groups based on assessment data and exit tickets. An ELA lesson included additional plans for struggling students as well as projected fast finishers. Students were assigned a writing task to complete. High-level students are given an essential question with a two-pronged answer required. Struggling students, including some ELLs and some students with disabilities, were given a one-pronged answer and also were given sentence starters and graphic organizers to help organize their thinking.
**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 empower teacher leaders and consistently communicate high expectations regarding professionalism, school culture, and pedagogy to the entire staff. Staff establishes a culture of learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

**Impact**

School leaders established systems of training to support accountability regarding high expectations for teachers. Additionally, teachers meet regularly to provide ongoing and detailed feedback to students so that they are prepared for college or career after high school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- As a school community there is a concerted effort to communicate high expectations to all members. Everyone is accountable for themselves and to each other to ensure core values are highly visible in actions and products. All students and staff are given an epicschools.nyc.org email account allowing for ongoing and seamless communication about general announcements and events. The principal communicates weekly to staff in the Weekly Bulletin and to families and students with EPIC South Notes. These weekly communications are substantive and include information about academic expectations, professional learning, community events, and social and emotional support. School leadership provides supports for professional development connected to questioning and discussion techniques and using assessments in instruction. The staff contributes to the professional development by leading workshops. Teachers shared that their goals in the past had included being involved in designing effective professional development activities that meet their specific needs and they were being given the opportunity now to do so.

- Guidance counselors meet with students to address equivalent credits necessary for a pathway to graduation. Students are made aware of their credit accumulation status. Students discuss college applications, financial aid support, and experiences with admission offices. Students are made aware of their college readiness and the steps necessary to attend graduation ceremonies. A student shared that during one meeting with a guidance counselor she discussed her desire to go to a community college to develop a stronger background in science and ultimately attend medical school and that the guidance counselor helped her find a program that would fit her. The student group expressed that they meet with their guidance counselors, who articulate their steps towards graduation, including establishing a deadline and pacing calendar to ensure success. A student stated, “This school has helped me from the beginning. Since I arrived in ninth grade, it’s always been about next steps and planning for my future. We are always planning our next steps.”

- All students attend an advisory class once a week. Students are placed into a small group by gender and grade and there are both student and teacher leaders. During advisory, student circles discuss things like conflict resolution, being a person of color in New York City, and other things needed for the path to success. At meetings with students, students shared that they strongly agree the period is engaging and helpful. More specifically they believe it helps them understand their credit accumulation, path to graduation, and what is needed to be a successful and productive member of society. A student stated, “Advisory helps students have a bond with adults and with other students that lasts throughout high school.” Another student shared, “Advisory has helped me find the pathway to success in high school.”
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

Teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations both in content areas and at the grade level. Teachers are empowered to positively affect student learning through teacher leadership opportunities.

Impact

Collaborations within teams have strengthened teachers’ instructional capacity and established a level of schoolwide instructional coherence. Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions regarding curriculum and resource acquisitions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers engage in a cycle of inquiry work that is informed from both summative and formative assessment data, teacher practice, and student work products. In inquiry teams, teachers have discovered learning gaps in students’ problem solving and writing skills and have developed pedagogical strategies such as flexible grouping, discussion protocols using sentence starters, triple entry journals, and DOK leveled questions to challenge students’ thinking and to construct quality work products. Teachers shared that based on inquiry work they did with their teams on multiple entry points for the various learners in their classrooms, lesson plans have evolved to be more descriptive with consideration of multiple entry points for diverse learners. One teacher shared that on their older lesson plans, there was no differentiation provided for learners. He stated, "Working with my inquiry group and looking at the data of our ELLs, students with disabilities and low performers and high performers showed us that we can no longer have a cookie-cutter, one size fits all lesson plan and need to instead plan multiple entry points and supports for all of the different students found within our classes."

- Teacher teams include department teams, a STEM team, a humanities team, and an Advanced Placement Vertical Planning team. Teacher teams utilize the Tuning Protocol along with the Data Mining Protocol developed by School Reform Initiative to analyze student work and student performance data sets to inform teacher practice. Teacher teams also utilize a Rolling Agenda stored in the school’s shared Google folder to memorialize and track teacher team progress and impact. Teacher teams are trained and have utilized the Tristate Rubric to assess curriculum to inform improvements. As a result of these practices, there are teachers showing consistent improvement in questioning and assessment as evidenced in reviewed Advance reports.

- School leaders and teacher instructional leads are able to identify distributed leadership practices and structures that are deeply rooted in the school’s day-to-day operations and articulate how these structures foster a culture in which teacher leaders provide continual input into strategic decisions that affect student achievement. Department teacher leaders at the department level, as well as teacher leaders at the grade level, are on the principal’s cabinet and a part of major school-based decisions, such as the implementation of curriculum and the hiring of new staff. Teachers cited involvement in designing and facilitating curriculum, mentoring, and teacher ownership of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Program (PBIS) as key areas in which they have had a voice in major school decisions affecting student learning. This has led to teachers having ownership and a stake in how the school runs and performs.