Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Rockaway Park High School
For Environmental Sustainability

High school 27Q324
100-00 Beach Channel Drive
Queens
NY 11694

Principal: Jennifer Connolly

Dates of Review:
November 28, 2017 - November 29, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Carlos Perez
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

Rockaway Park High School For Environmental Sustainability 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>
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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 Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<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>Additional Finding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Finding**

### Systems for Improvement

<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>

**Additional Finding**

### Systems for Improvement

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<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>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Finding**

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<tbody>
<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>Area of Celebration</td>
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**Area of Celebration**

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

**Additional Finding**

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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>

**Additional Finding**
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings
School leaders and teachers support teacher development through a strategic cycle of classroom observations, intervisitations, and a transparent system for managing professional development (PD).

Impact
Schoolwide instructional practices are supported and elevated leading to a growth in the quality of student work products and teacher instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have a structured teacher observation system in place that uses low-inference notes aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders strategically visit classrooms as a unit in order to norm their process and align the feedback they offer to teachers. Feedback to teachers captures the strengths of the observed lesson and teachers are provided with timely and actionable next steps that include expectations for implementation of suggested practices in subsequent classroom visits. Feedback to one teacher resulted in use of higher-order thinking questions to elicit more information thus fostering increased student engagement with rigorous discussions, rather than instructional compliance. Additionally, school leaders provide teachers feedback regarding the effective use of cooperative groups including suggestions to ensure full student engagement with assigned roles and responsibilities, such as note taker, timekeeper, and facilitator.

- School leaders support staff with training and professional development experiences connected to improving the quality of student work products and retention. Teachers are supported through a variety of in-house and off-site professional development specifically to meet the school goal of increasing rigor in the classroom. Several teachers have completed their administrative internship in the school while others have been promoted to leadership roles. Recently the school's guidance counselor completed their administrative internship under the supervision of the school principal, which led to the development of feedback structures for classroom walk-through's and team meetings. Overall, teachers value the principals' "collaborative and inclusive" succession plans while recognizing staff who show an interest in school leadership.

- School leaders expressed feedback and next steps for teachers has resulted in "great strides" with teaching practices. Instructional progress from observation reports is tracked using an online teacher evaluation system. Additionally, school leaders emphasize informal observations to promote professional growth and teacher reflection. For example, an email sent to a teacher regarding a recent classroom visit, detailed areas of concern and offered instructional approaches to address them. Specifically, guidance was provided to pause videos periodically and "ask questions that will promote discussions amongst groups of students." Additionally, teachers visit their colleagues in order to gain further knowledge and specific pedagogical skills they may need support in.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Developing |

Findings

Teaching practices are becoming aligned to the school’s beliefs that students learn best when engaged in student-centered lessons and discussions.

Impact

Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of rigor and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Student’s engagement in group and partner discussions was uneven throughout classrooms visited. During a global history class, students engaged in a Socratic seminar about the second amendment and gun violence in the United States. During the Socratic seminar, students actively engaged in group discussions and used accountable talk stems and appropriate academic vocabulary. Students in the outside circle rated their classmate’s quality of response using a discussion rubric. Student discussions were rigorous and the questions they developed challenged student thinking and reflected high-level questions on Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK). Students questioned peers about “How do you qualify someone in order for them to get a gun” and “How do you compare someone needing a gun during the 1800’s to someone needing a gun today?” However, majority of other classes visited, including an Earth Science class, lacked similar high-levels of student engagement and discussion. This lesson was teacher-centered and did not offer students opportunities to engage in group or partner discussions. Teacher questions often limited critical thinking and were asked to few select students.

- Across classrooms, inconsistent evidence of student work products reflect varying levels of student thinking and participation. For example, during a career and finance class, students were actively engaged in creating a budget simulation that allowed them to recognize and understand concepts associated with savings and budgeting. Students created a monthly budget that included expenses such as insurance, student loans, utilities, transportation, food and charitable donations. Students were also able to demonstrate through application interest and compound interest. Students further explained the importance of teenagers maintaining a budget as a realistic goal. They explained that it teaches them how to be “more mature, and prepares them for the future.” They also shared how having a budget also makes you think twice about spending money on items that are not necessities.” This type of meaningful learning was not consistently observed across the majority of other classes.

- The instructional belief is that students learn best when they are engaged in lessons which are student-centered and teacher facilitated. During an English Language Arts (ELA) lesson, students were engaged in collaborative discussions centered on the understanding of fate and free will. The conversations were student-led and the teacher aided in promoting thinking. During the discussions, there was clear evidence of students citing text-based evidence that offered the page, paragraph and line of the passages they referenced. One student shared how they believed that “Free will and fate are connected to each other” and then gave evidence to back up her claim. However, in other classes teacher-centered instruction limited students thinking and learning.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

All staff ensure that curriculum is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts including a focus on academic vocabulary and rigorous activities.

Impact

Curriculum is consistently designed in a way that is accessible for a variety of learners including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders shared evidence of curricular coherence and alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards. One curricular foci has been to increase the use of academic vocabulary and text complexity throughout all subject areas. Staff address the instructional foci during frequent grade and content teams. Teachers shared how this practice has led to coherence across subject areas and increased planned instruction to improve student use of academic vocabulary. A review of the school’s math curriculum highlights areas addressing the use of academic vocabulary, such as comparison and relationship between “equations as an expression.” An Earth Science lesson plan that dealt with identifying and classifying a variety of rock samples included the use of key content vocabulary such as igneous, sedimentary, and fragmental.

- Higher-order skills and rigorous habits for all students including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities was noted on many of the curricular documents reviewed. An earth science lesson plan indicated how tiered groups of students would identify, exam and classify a variety of rock samples. Planned supports for all students during this lesson include the use of graphic organizers, flexible cooperative groups, and visual and audio cues. Similarly, an algebra lesson plan was designed to support student’s ability to understand how the function from one set (domain) to another set (range) is assigned to each element of its domain. This lesson plan detailed and listed the use of various DOK questions, along with support in the use of a graphing calculator. Additionally, the lesson plan included instruction connected to content relevant vocabulary.

- Planned curricular documents include real-world situations thus embedding relevant connections to the students’ lives. A budgeting and finance lesson included an activity where students are required to use appropriate tools essential to planning and implementing a personal student monthly budget. Real world and relevant components of the assignment included, student loans, car insurance, and financing for entertainment. A global history lesson plan, provided students with accountable talk stems, presentation rubrics, and directions regarding the use of productive and effective communication skills to further engage students in skills connected to college and careers.
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 and students use and create rubrics that are aligned to the curriculum. All grades and subject areas administer and use common assessments, such as quarterly exams.

Impact

Teachers provide students feedback that is actionable and timely. Common assessments are used to make adjustments to curriculum and teacher pedagogical practices.

Supporting Evidence

- Feedback from teachers to students is actionable, timely, and offers student’s opportunities to improve on a specific skill or set of skills. This was evident in feedback to a student’s writing assignment where the teacher commended the student for their ability to confirm her predictions in the novel. The next steps suggested ways to help the student tie in the biblical references from the novel pertaining to her claim. Additional evidence of actionable and specific feedback was seen on a students’ environmental science writing assignment. The teacher praised the students’ support of supplying a focus with “relevant and solid evidence.” The teacher provided next steps by explaining to the student how they could have furthered their connections of the evidence by making real-world influences.

- At the start of the year, teachers meet with their students and set individual goals with them based on teacher input and what the students felt they should be focusing on. Teachers meet regularly and discuss students they share across classes aligning their goals and review and provide guidance for students throughout the year. During these meetings, teachers share individual student data and discuss the ways they will support the student with additional academic support, or adjusting instruction. In addition, the school uses quarterly assessments in all subject areas in order to carefully gauge and monitor student progress towards individual goals.

- During a meeting with students, they were able to articulate how the teacher feedback is beneficial and useful for improving subsequent assignments. One student shared feedback they received from their teacher noted the need to include more evidence in their writing. As such, the student shared how on the next writing assignment they conducted “more research in order to add more evidence.” Other students shared similar experiences stating how the feedback they receive helps them think about the ways they can improve their next assignment. One student shared, “If we didn’t get feedback from our teachers, many of us would probably make the same mistakes all the time.”
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations connected to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and student academic progress to all students and staff.

Impact

Training, feedback, and supports provide all staff and students ways to hold themselves accountable for meeting high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are communicated through a variety of ways beginning with the staff handbook that is disseminated at the start of each school year. The staff handbook includes policies regarding student and staff attendance, mandated reporter procedures, and expectations for maintaining teacher bulletin boards. Page nine of the handbook clearly defines bulletin board expectations to be including; task, rubric, steps of the writing process, feedback, and examples of exemplary student work. Expectations associated with the Danielson Framework for Teaching are communicated regularly through the formal and informal observation process. School leaders communicate their expectations via email, observation reports and verbally to all staff. An email from the principal to a teacher demonstrated how her thoughts and expectations regarding an informal classroom visit holds teachers accountable. The email communicated reminders regarding classroom management, instructional choices, and level of proficiency according to criteria within the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric.

- Teachers are preparing students for college and careers through a variety of means. The guidance counselors meet with all juniors several times throughout the year to review and discuss the steps necessary to apply to college. During these sessions, students discuss and work on their college essays, financial aid needs, and review criteria and identify interests related to selecting colleges and universities. Seniors have opportunity to take part in internships with local community businesses that collaborate with the school. Students can explore interests as well as work experiences in a variety of areas, including some they may not have initially considered. Students also shared they attend trips to colleges beginning in ninth grade through their senior year. One student expressed the “school prepares us in every way, from how to communicate with peers, and all of our academic work as well.”

- Professional learning opportunities on and off-campus align with teacher goals and the instructional focus of the school. Teachers take part in professional development opportunities every Monday and during teacher team meetings. Professional learning supports inquiry work, curricular planning, and collaborations that establish a culture of high expectations and learning. School leaders are an integral part of the professional learning and offer teachers support that is aligned with integrating those expectations effectively.
**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in team structured inquiry cycles and take on leadership roles through a variety of ways.

**Impact**

Teachers’ instructional practices are strengthened and supported through a detailed analysis of student work products. Additionally, they have leadership capacity where their voice contributes to improving student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- During a meeting with teachers, staff illustrated various distributive leadership structures that are present in the school. Teachers shared how they attend off campus self-selected professional development and turnkey their learning with colleagues. In addition, teachers also run workshops for parents, as this was requested by parents. Guidance counselors facilitate presentations regarding alcohol abuse, sexuality, bullying, and financial aid for both students and their parents. Teachers also take on leadership roles through the recently adopted teacher mentor program. New teachers are mentored and supported by veteran teachers via weekly meetings, lesson plan development review, and classroom intervisitations. During the meeting with teachers, several new teachers shared how impactful the mentoring has been to supporting their professional growth and emotional well-being.

- Teachers meet regularly and reflect on work samples for students they share across grades and subject areas. During this time, teachers analyze the work products and identify areas of concern and misconceptions to adjust instructional practices and offer additional support to students. During a ninth grade team meeting, teachers followed a protocol and reviewed three pieces of students’ work at different levels of proficiency, low, medium, and high. Teachers reviewed the work through the lens of answering, how to support higher-level analysis questions. Teachers reviewed the student work products and asked clarifying or probing questions connected to the quality of student work. Teachers also offered feedback to the teacher along with pedagogical strategies that will support students on similar assignments.

- Teachers take on leadership roles leading the professional development committee, participating on the School Leadership Team, and serve as lead teachers in the college access program. Throughout the weekly teacher team meetings, teachers take on the role of team facilitator and lead the meetings to ensure proper protocol is followed. Teacher leaders oversee the internship program for students. Teacher leaders also work closely with students and local businesses for placement aligned to their interests and the needs of the community. Distributive leadership opportunities have led to a much higher level of trust, collaborative, and supportive school culture.