Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Epic High School - North
High school 27Q334
94-25 117Th Street
Queens
NY 11419

Principal: David Weinberg

Dates of Review:
April 12, 2018 - April 13, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Lenneen Gibson
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 - North 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

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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>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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

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

The school’s approach to support a safe and inclusive school environment is informed by its theory of action that states, if students view themselves as assets to the school community, then it will be safe and inclusive for students. Staff members receive training in conducting restorative circles.

Impact

Structures such as Student Voices Matter, morning meetings, and “shout outs” exemplify student voice in decision-making and initiating school improvement, thus resulting in students being motivated to attend school.

Supporting Evidence

- A safe and inclusive school culture is predicated by a theory of action that if students view themselves as assets to the school community, then the school will be a safe and inclusive place for students, for they will feel successful and part of the community. This is exemplified through rituals such as student-led and organized morning meetings. Each week, a grade collaborates and selects activities for the whole school to work with one another in order to engage in positive social interactions. Activities such as Jeopardy or musical chairs are selected by students to ensure a positive start of the school day. The students also plan closing day activities, known as “shout outs,” where students and teachers commend one another for positive attributes, such as being active participants in class. As a result of these practices, students stated that the morning meetings and “shout outs” motivate them to come to school, and they look forward to the school day.

- Structures are in place for students to have a positive impact on school improvement. A student representative from each grade form Student Voices Matter, a group which meets with the principal weekly to discuss the consistency of rigor in their classes. Students share their concerns with the principal, involved parties are consulted, and solutions are implemented. For example, senior students mentioned a lack of progress monitoring in one of their classes. As a result of student voice, a tracker was implemented in class to monitor student progress and now students are more aware of their performance. The freshman class appealed for additional support in their math classes. As a result of student initiative, students are now asked for feedback in their math classes. A student shared that instruction in a sophomore class was too traditional and not student-centered. As a result of this feedback from student voices, students now collaborate with the teacher and lead lessons in the class every other week.

- Core classes serve as advisories that meet daily. In addition, each student is assigned an advisor who knows him or her very well. A student stated that her advisor was her “big sister” and supported her emotionally. This sentiment was shared by the student group. Core classes at each grade level have a different concentration, such as current events, having your own identity, preparing for the preliminary scholastic aptitude test (PSAT), or completing college admission projects. “Rights of Passage” is a weekly meeting of all students and advisors in a single gender setting. Students are allowed to speak their minds, and this results in mutually supportive relationships with peers and advisors. Restorative circles are opportunities to practice conflict resolution. However, the circles are not only used for conflict resolution but are also the vehicle for students and adults to resolve instructional issues. Students in this setting can speak to their teachers about the caliber of instruction they are receiving and have a voice how they are taught. As a result of these issues, the school has not had an incident in the school for the last four years, as cited by the Online Occurrence Reporting System.
# Area of Focus

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

Classroom practices reflect an articulated belief that students learn best through rigor and engagement, which was reflected in student work products and discussions. However, these practices were not evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

## Impact

Teaching practices foster high levels of student thinking and participation. However, there were missed opportunities for students to demonstrate ownership of their learning.

## Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching practices demonstrated an espoused belief that students learn best through instruction that exemplifies rigor and student engagement. In an Advanced Placement (AP) Literature course, students were using *Frankenstein* as the anchor text for a moral ambiguity project that questioned the moral boundaries of human progress and drew conclusions as to who owns moral responsibility. Students were observed writing their responses on Post-its and grouping their responses into categories, such as the intent of creation and the reality of creation. Student discussions on the rationale for their categories were evident. In an AP United States History class, the objective of was, “How did the Cold War begin to ‘heat up’ during the 1950’s and the 1960’s?” Students conducted a simulation by assuming the identities of major players in the Cuban Missile Crisis and determined whether to escalate or de-escalate the crisis based on scenarios and using multiple perspectives. Student thinking was apparent as they justified their reasons to escalate or de-escalate. However, in an AP Biology class, students commenced their review for their Advanced Placement exam, and student discussion was directed to the teacher and not to their peers, thus impeding opportunities for students engage in the review process.

- Teachers provide students with challenging tasks that require critical thinking and analysis. In a Global History Integrated Co-Teaching class (ICT), students assessed the types of propaganda tactics used in World War II by using primary source documents and citing evidence. Working in groups with roles determined by the students, a student mentioned that the document analyzed was used to benefit the United States military and appealed to patriotism. Students were also heard making inferences that the images were not facts but represented the views of others. In a Living Environment class, students prepared their own slides to observe a plant’s stomata under the microscope. Students were observed working collaboratively by collecting measurement data and photographing their slides for their laboratory reports. However, in an English as a New Language class, student engagement was passive as they conducted a close reading activity to learn about the geographical benefits of Thailand’s waterways. There were limited opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions across the groups.

- In a ninth grade (ICT) class, students engaged in a Socratic seminar using evidence from articles, life experiences, and the anchor text *1984* to answer the question, “Does the truth matter?” Students justified their responses using current events articles and a chapter from the anchor text, stating, "Truth does matter. The government shouldn’t corrupt the mind of the citizens…” In an Algebra I class, students worked collaboratively to discern the real world applicability of polynomials. Students were given graphs, scenarios, and mathematical expressions to determine if the equation was exponential, quadratic or a polynomial. Students were observed discussing the rationale for their choice of equations and scenarios, thus reflecting high levels of student participation.
**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**

School leaders ensure that interdisciplinary curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, integrate the instructional shift of citing textual evidence, and include specific learning targets called attainments. Curricula and academic tasks exemplify rigorous habits by incorporating real world applicability.

**Impact**

Rigorous curricula and academic tasks emphasize higher-order skills and are accessible for a variety of learners through the use of scaffolding, critical thinking, and problem solving.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The curricular documents showed alignment to the Common Core and/or content standards. Additionally, the school has defined what it means to attain the enduring understandings and key skills that ensure success in colleges and careers by satisfying learning targets known as “attainments.” An English as a New Language lesson plan required students to use close reading strategies to identify key words and facts in the passage that supported the importance of the geography of Bangkok in supporting trade. The learning target for the lesson was, “I can analyze and explain what the author is trying to convey within the text.” Similarly, a Common Core-aligned Global History lesson plan required students to cite evidence from propaganda images from World War II. The standard required students to determine the author’s point of view or purpose in the text. In an Advanced Placement Literature lesson plan, students were tasked with working on differentiated tasks based on the text *Frankenstein*, answering four essential questions, such as, “What responsibility belongs to the creator, society, and/or consumer of the creation?” Students were also tasked with mastering four attainments, with one being, “I can formulate a sound argument based on evidence.”

- Curricula and tasks challenge all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. A ninth-grade task entitled “Contagion” required students to devise strategies to identify, diagnose, and propose a solution for a rapidly spreading disease in New York City. Students used multiple perspectives, such as scientific and socio-political lenses, in designing a marketing strategy to educate the public of their findings. Scaffolds such as graphic organizers were used to deconstruct the content to support diverse learners. An Algebra 1 performance task required students to calculate the interest earned from a bank savings account. Through graphing and comparing their data, students identified which person garnered more money in the account. Another Algebra 1 lesson plan required students to formulate the real world applications of polynomials and quadratic equations by designing a dream resort. The lesson plan cited multiple entry points, such as heterogeneous grouping and scaffolding questions.

- A chemistry unit plan required students to assume the role of a National Transportation Safety Board engineer to determine the cause for the crash of flight 143. The interdisciplinary unit linked chemistry and math and included alignment to the Next Generation Science Standards, such as showing how molecular level structures are important in the design of materials. Attainments such as mathematical reasoning and writing effectively for a particular audience, purpose, or task were cited in the plan. An Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) lesson plan on the Gilded Age cited alignment to the APUSH content standards, the Common Core, and an attainment of analyzing documents to formulate a claim. In general, unit and lesson plans cite content standards, the Common Core, and learning targets to build coherence and promote college and career readiness.
Additional Finding

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

Teachers use rubrics, such as a mastery-based grading rubric, that are aligned to the school’s curricula. Attainment trackers are used to determine student progress towards goals across grades and content areas.

Impact

Students receive actionable feedback from their work that they are able to use across content areas. The results from attainment trackers are used to adjust performance tasks and projects.

Supporting Evidence

- Students and teachers track their progress towards mastery of attainments (learning targets) through an online tracker system across grades and content areas. Using a performance-based assessment system and portfolios, students demonstrate mastery towards attainments through their projects. An eleventh-grade tracker showed students' progress towards mastery of four attainments across all subject areas. For example, attainment sixty-four cites, “I can reflect my thoughts, actions, and experiences and make decisions and meaning that are based on my observations and insights.” A ninth-grade tracker showed student progress towards project completion and attainments. The data gleaned from the student mastery of attainments as well as student input are used to revise the performance assessments.

- A senior attainment tracker showed student progress towards garnering the sixty-six attainments required for graduation and their portfolios. In addition, the tracker showed plans to prepare students in achieving their attainments, such as noting a student’s projects and format, the stage of development of the projects, what subjects the student need to complete the projects, and the supports needed in order to successfully achieve the attainments. Teachers use this information to plan the attainment presentation schedule, and attainment data is used to revise projects for the upcoming year.

- Students receive feedback on their work across grades and content areas using a mastery-based grading rubric that assesses student mastery towards attainments, the rigor of a given task as it pertains to Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* levels one through four, and how a project may be differentiated through scaffolding and using different modes of delivery. Students also track their own progress towards mastery of attainments through personalized trackers they create and through their progress reports. In the student meeting, they recounted the feedback they received on their work and how it applied to other subject areas. For example, a student received feedback about using the proper citation in a chemistry project, with next steps. The student said that he was able to utilize the feedback received in other subject areas when asked to cite sources, and this response was mirrored by other students in the group. Consequently, students are able to articulate the feedback they have received and transfer it to use in other subject areas, thus internalizing the skills learned.
Additional Finding

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

Findings
School leaders use an online system to communicate high expectations connected to college and career readiness to families and partner with families through instructional rounds. Teacher teams and staff convey a culture for learning that is systematically communicated through advisory classes.

Impact
The school community supports student progress towards high expectations and preparing students for the next level via a summer program for incoming freshmen, student-led parent conferences, providing opportunities to take college level courses, and exposing students to colleges through college visits and presentations about the college application process and life.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses multiple means of communicating with parents about their children’s academic performance and expectations for college and career readiness. In addition to quarterly report cards, parents receive quarterly progress reports of their children’s progress towards completing attainments. Schoology, an online platform, is used by parents and students to gain information about their children’s academic performance. Moreover, weekly parent engagement meetings provide parents an opportunity to meet with their child’s teacher and advisor and to learn how he or she is performing. Parents partner with the school by participating in instructional rounds with school leaders to observe instructional practices and collaboratively identify problems of practice. Feedback from the parents is used to make adjustments to the instructional practices across the classrooms, fostering school-family partnerships.

- The school orchestrates events such as student-led conferences that enable students to meet with their parents to detail their performance in their classes. During the parent meetings, parents attested that they are elated with the process of student-led conferences, for it demonstrates how students are held accountable for their performance. College workshops for the parents demystify the college application process, including how to attain financial aid. This process communicates high expectations about college and career readiness to the families.

- In the student meeting, a student in the junior level advisory class discussed collaborating with another student on a college admission project to learn about different types of colleges, the steps to complete for applying to college, how to determine a college major of interest, and how to choose what colleges would be the best fit for students. A senior student in the meeting said that completing this project before the senior year assuaged her fears about the college application process. Through the creation of these high level, inquiry-based projects that all juniors complete, the staff establishes a culture that communicates high expectation for all students, including expectations that aspire towards higher level learning. Indeed, starting in the ninth grade, all students visit one college campus a year to learn about college life. Incoming freshman attend a summer bridge program that is run by upperclassmen to get students ready for high school, to expose students to the culture of the school as well as apprise them of the project-based learning model adopted by the school. Students also have opportunities to take Advanced Placement courses in core subject areas. As a result of these practices, fifty percent of the seniors have received early acceptances to colleges and universities, and seventy-five percent of the seniors have met their graduation requirements thus far.
Additional Finding

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

Findings
Teachers are engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations, such as grade and professional development teams that analyze student attainment data and student work.

Impact
Teacher professional collaborations have resulted in the implementation of a mastery grading rubric and a focus on questioning during instruction. The analysis of student attainments (learning targets) has resulted in students being on track to garnering their sixty-six attainments for graduation.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have built a culture of professional collaboration that includes team meetings and intervisitation. An eleventh-grade team was observed engaging in the inquiry process that analyzed the caliber of questions posed by teachers and students during the second round of peer intervisitation. Using the “Affinity Mapping” protocol, teachers first debriefed about the classes visited and met in partnerships to discuss noticing about questioning. The partners organized the interactions in the classes as teacher-to-student or student-to-student. Using Post it notes, teachers chronicled the salient data pieces from the observations, such as teachers’ scaffolding high level questions and driving most of the questioning, while students posed low level questions to one another. During the first round of intervisitation, students were not posing questions, whereas now they are. The team devised next steps such as making students aware of the goal to ask higher order thinking questions. Additionally, the team devised goals such as coming up with a strategy to track student questions via a tracker, having teachers use sentence starters in their lessons, and providing opportunities for students to ask higher level Depth of Knowledge questions in the lesson. For the subsequent meeting, teachers talked about devising a questioning rubric. Teachers stated that the impact of teacher team work has been to build instructional coherence in classrooms and to allow teachers to share best practices.

- The school has a structure of professional development teams that are responsible for developing rubrics and initiatives, with one being the mastery collaborative team. A review of meeting notes revealed that the team goal was to shift the perceptions of the staff and students about what is mastery. The team sought to identify at the various grade level teams how mastery has been demonstrated, what steps were used to demonstrate mastery, and any struggles encountered in the process. Information shared among the teams was that mastery was incorporated in the feedback provided to students by using the language found in the learning targets. As result of the team’s work and using a “Rubric Tuning Protocol” to modify rubrics, the team constructed and has currently adopted a mastery-based grading rubric to norm what mastery based work should demonstrate.

- A review of teacher team notes revealed a twelfth-grade team looked at student performance on projects that count towards graduation. Goals were devised for groups of students and teachers. Student goals included overarching questions such as, “What does an Epic senior look like?” with objectives like building resiliency and grit during project development and having students take initiative when completing projects. Goals for the teachers cited using trackers to communicate student needs and incorporating student voice to build and tune projects. Rubrics such as the 66 Attainment Rubric were utilized for assessing student work, trackers were created to communicate student progress, and, as a result of the teacher team work, students are on track to towards their sixty-six attainments.