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

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

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<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>1.1 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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### 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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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>
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### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings
Teacher teams, such as the School Instructional Inquiry Team (SIIT), grade and subject teams, systematically analyze key elements of work to implement instructional practice such as the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) based on student work and assessments. Distributed leadership structures are embedded.

Impact
Teacher team work results in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The SIIT, with representative teachers from all grades and content areas, examines student performance on Regents exams through item analysis data to recognize schoolwide trends that impact student instruction. This teacher team engages in discussions to identify the standards across the subjects in which students performed poorly, noting as a pattern that students struggled with questions, in particular in the constructed responses requiring high levels of literacy. To address this, the school leaders and staff decided to utilize online literacy assessments and instructional supports for all grade nine students, as well as students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). The teacher team additionally decided to implement the QFT instructional strategy across grades and content areas to promote student centered questioning and discussion, and form the schoolwide instructional focus towards writing across the content areas.

- During this visit, students were seen participating in the Question Formulation Technique across grades and subject classes, including mathematics, social studies and English Language Arts (ELA). Students generated questions about their work, collaborated with peers to seek solutions, and came to consensus on higher order questions to pose to larger groups of students. Artifacts from various vertical subject teacher teams include examining student work products using the schoolwide Writing Across the Curriculum rubric to assess student mastery and identify additional instructional strategies such as differentiating reading texts based on Lexile levels. Such changes in instruction and teacher team inquiry has resulted in mastery of goals for groups of students, in particular, 49 percent of grade nine students have made positive growth in their Lexile levels towards or beyond mastery from the September to March benchmarks according to the school’s online literacy assessment.

- Distributed leadership structures are embedded throughout the school community, with teachers serving as grade and subject team leaders, where such roles feed into the SSIT to make key decisions that impact instruction, curriculum and student experiences. For example, teachers proposed and advocated for a greater schoolwide effort to support student college and career readiness through more college-level coursework embedded within the school. Such advocacy has increased the number of Advanced Placement courses for student selection, which then has resulted in a doubling percentage, from 26 percent to 52 percent in the school’s College Readiness Index within the past two school years.
Area of Focus

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

Findings
Curricula consistently emphasize rigorous habits such as evaluation and presentation of strategies across grades and subject areas. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using in-class student work and assessment data.

Impact
While a diversity of learners have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged in their work, there are missed opportunities to plan for groups of students who are high achieving to elevate their cognitive engagement.

Supporting Evidence

- Planned tasks within lesson plans and unit plans consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order thinking across grades and subjects. Plans for an Algebra II/Trigonometry lesson included students analyzing mathematical representations of a radical function and determining which representation – table, graphical or algebraic – serves as the most useful to solve real-life problems of a traveling tidal wave. Students were to calculate points of increasing/decreasing speed at various intervals, and evaluate the strategies that peers used to solve the situational problem with or without the use of calculators. Student groups, based on in-class assessments and previous self-evaluations of mastery, were to be strategically selected to present their findings on questions ranging in difficulty, and prove to their peers not only findings but their rationales as to why a certain strategy was the most useful.

- Some plans included purposeful curricular extensions for students who were already performing at a high level. Lesson plans for students in a Living Environment integrated co-teaching setting included working in groups on three differentiated tasks to explore how deoxynucleic acid stores genetic information. One group of students, including students with disabilities and ELLs, were to use manipulatives to code and replicate lines of genetic code around reciprocal building blocks of adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine. Planned tasks for another group of students included annotating and responding to a more difficult text around the double helix, with additional vocabulary and information about the composition and molecular structure of DNA. A third group of students were to focus on deconstructing and responding to the previous years’ Regents exam genetics questions, including explaining the difference between chromosomes and genes, and why different human organs with specialized cells function differently, even though each cell has the same DNA. Such planning for meaningful extensions of learning tasks was evident in some but not the vast majority of plans, thus potentially hampering some students from further developing their higher order thinking.

- Plans for a grade ten global history lesson were to work in three heterogeneous and one homogenous group to create a thinking map, using concept index cards and sticks to show idea relationships towards the cause of World War II. Students were to discuss and debate within their groups and come to consensus on how certain ideas, such as the rise of nationalism, the Paris Peace Conference, imperialism, and the Great Depression related to each other and contributed to the start of the conflict. Students who had previously struggled with these concepts based on exit tickets and interim assessments were to work in a homogenous group to link a reduced number of concept cards to focus their attention around the biggest factors, aided by a scaffold for creating thinking maps. Conversely, students performing at or above mastery had a greater number of concept cards that could both be causal or correlational relationships. However, such refinement of academic tasks based on student data for those highest achieving students was evident in some, but not the vast majority of planning documents reviewed.
Additional Finding

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

Across classrooms, teaching strategies such as the use of purposeful groupings for discussion, differentiated tasks, tiered and translated texts, graphic organizers and scaffolds consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and support students to produce meaningful work products.

Impact

All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products and discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classes teaching strategies, such as the use of differentiated tasks and scaffolds, purposeful groupings and leveled texts provide multiple entry points to challenging academic work for a variety of learners including ELLs and students with disabilities. Students in a grade nine science Living Environment class discussed how natural selection assisted animals to survive and reproduce. Examining the example of the toucan birds, students worked on tiered texts at the 400, 660 and 1040 Lexile levels on the same topic. ELLs whose primary language was French also had translated copies of the text, as well as parallel oral translation from the English as a New Language teacher. Through text analysis, partner and group discussions, students emerged with an overall question about natural selection, created claims and substantiated their claims with evidence and reasoning. Students were supported with a graphic organizer to structure their thoughts for discussions.

- Groups of students in a grade eleven ELA class worked to synthesize the context and setting of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Using the Social, Political, Religious, Intellectual, Technological and Economic (SPRITE) framework utilized by the social studies department, students analyzed specific elements of the dystopian society evident in select text through peer-to-peer discussions. Students worked in purposeful groupings determined by in-class performances, self-assessments and exit slips with different groups focusing on specific literary concepts, ranging from concrete elements such as setting, plot, writing structure or more thematic elements such as the inferences to a caste system or elements of dystopian society evident in *Brave New World*. Such purposeful groupings support students as they work on challenging tasks and demonstrate higher order thinking skills.

- Grade twelve students in an economics class worked towards a culminating project of creating a financially diverse portfolio utilizing a combination of company stocks, bonds, index funds, and mutual funds. Student partnerships researched financial options utilizing various online tools to examine fund performances including those related to the Rule of 72, a calculation to determine when an investment will double given a fixed annual interest rate. Through their research, students worked towards creating a report or slideshow presentation for peers that outlines not only the logistics such as how funds will be transferred and brokerage fees, but also the risk and return prospects for their investment strategy, and ultimate rationales for their decisions. Grade ten students in global history class created concept maps that linked various causes of the Second World War, first discussing within their groups how individuals, events, and ideas were tied together during the interwar years. Students were heard debating whether there were causations or correlations between concepts. Student work products such as portfolios and student discussions that reflect high levels of thinking were evident across classrooms visited.
Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use assessments such as mock Regents exams, college-level writing rubrics, and unit-based rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Through teacher assessment practices, students receive actionable feedback to support their growth, and teachers make effective adjustments to instruction to meet student needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers use assessments such as teacher-created mock Regents exams as formative assessments, online assessment platforms, performance-based tasks, content specific and performance specific rubrics such as the cooperative learning rubric, that are aligned to the school curricula. Students are given feedback through teacher-created assessments and rubrics by grades and across subject areas that align with specific units of study. For example, in an ELA on-demand writing assessment based on a City University of New York Assessment Test in Writing, teacher feedback included a rubric articulating expectations for critical responses to writing, idea development, response structure, sentence and word choices, and grammar. Specific feedback included comments within student writing, scores based on the rubric, as well as a concluding summary: “I think your 2nd and 3rd paragraphs are your strength in that you combine several different ideas into one single larger idea. The weakness is your wording and structure. Try to “listen” to your words as you write… to keep the academic tone while also ensuring strong word choice to get your ideas across.”

- Interviewed students shared that in addition to teacher feedback, they evaluate peer work and give each other feedback as part of their learning experiences, resulting in concrete ways to improve their work. A student shared that during an ELA lesson, students evaluated each other’s writing work based on the unit rubric, and debated whether or not their partner had demonstrated the score that they had received from the teacher; Another student shared how they read each other’s biology journals utilizing the scoring rubric and task guideline, highlighting where they had been successful but also noting where the work had fallen short. Students unanimously stated that the peer feedback they received made sense and helped them improve their work because “we trust different collaborations with each other.”

- Teachers use question generation protocols, conduct conferences, and utilize student work products to assess mastery and adjust instructional activities within the lesson to address the learning needs of a diversity of learners. For example, in a geometry lesson, the teacher utilized the QFT where students first individually generated various questions about the work to then discuss within their groups as they calculated the volume of a three-dimensional water tower based on information from a two-dimensional model. According to the questions that students generated, the teacher adjusted his whole group questioning to clarify misunderstandings such as finding area for the two-dimensional model rather than the volume of the three-dimensional water tower. The teacher also conducted small-group conferences to help students apply trigonometry strategies towards finding volume of the cone top of the water tower. Students then self-assessed through the schoolwide Self-Assessment Tool where students identify their own areas of mastery and challenge, with the information used to inform follow-up lessons. The utilization, or classroom artifacts of student use, of the QFT protocol and Self-Assessment Tool was seen across classrooms and content areas.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations for teaching through individual and team meetings across the school. Staff members systematically communicate the high expectations for college and career readiness with families through online platforms and transcript reviews.

Impact

A culture of shared accountability supports teaching and learning through professional development (PD) and contributes to strong partnerships among staff and families, which leads to student progress towards meeting high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders articulate high expectations for all staff through memos and discussions at faculty conferences, as well as with individuals and teams. School leaders meet regularly with teachers to engage in reviews of professional growth, expectations for high quality teaching and learning and follow-up based on attended PD, as well as strategic assignments for peer-to-peer intervisitations. To expand capacity in delivering effective instruction, all teachers receive feedback on their performance in relation to best practices highlighted by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders further reinforce instructional high expectations by providing all teachers with PD support in skill building to improve their proficiency in areas specifically aligned to the schoolwide instructional focus of questioning, discussion and writing across the disciplines, as evidenced in the PD Calendar. Interviewed teachers unanimously shared that administrators give clear and detailed written feedback, identifying current classroom practices through transcriptions of in-class dialogues with concrete examples to improve practice, and that the feedback has changed their instructional practice.

- Through individual and team discussions at grade, department, and common planning meetings, staff members receive comprehensive PD support aligned to their needs and interests. Teacher teams collaborate to develop curriculum maps, units of study, lesson plans, formative assessments, common performance rubrics and share student performance through a schoolwide online platform, which helps to build capacity to meet high expectations for instruction, communication, and professionalism by all. Interviewed teachers related that teachers hold each other mutually accountable for not only consistent planning and pedagogy across the grades, but also discussing individual student concerns with colleagues, and patterns of behavior or family challenges so that they can collaboratively develop action plans to support the student across classrooms.

- Staff members communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness to families through the Excelsior Express parent newsletter, the schoolwide grading policy, bilingual online platforms, phone calls, open house nights, online platforms, and personal meetings such as individualized transcript reviews. Interviewed parents shared ways they successfully partner with the school towards college and career readiness. One parent shared that she received guidance on how to continue to support her son’s budding interest in music sparked by the school’s arts program. Through a school-university partnership, the student was able to participate in various summer, during and after school music programs towards becoming a professional musician. Another parent shared that in addition to her child taking courses leading to college credit, both the parent and child are proud that they have been able to receive software training and technical certification that they can both use for the future.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

School leaders and faculty support the development of all teachers through strategic cycles of observations according to subject bands, and through focused colleague intervisitations. Teachers receive feedback, which accurately captures their strengths and challenges that outline next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Teachers receive feedback that articulates clear expectations for their practice, aligns with teacher professional goals and supports teacher development elevating instructional practices.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct strategic and frequent cycles of support and observations, which serve as the basis for teacher peer intervisitations to build instructional practices on specific Danielson Framework for Teaching domains. School leaders align observations in cycles for all teachers around subject bands, with supervisory responsibilities strategically aligned to the instructional and content expertise of assistant principals. Observation reports specifically articulate student work products through direct student quotes and discussion transcripts, aligned to the schoolwide instructional focus on pedagogical practices supporting student writing across the disciplines. Further analysis of student work products is deepened by both one-on-one and teacher team meetings that identify patterns and trends for individuals and groups of students on benchmark assessments, and specific instructional moves for those groups of students including ELLs and students with disabilities.

- Feedback results in teacher development and changes in teacher practice. For example, a teacher observation report identified a strength in practice, describing a “genuine discussion among students, providing adequate time for students, and stepping aside” so that students are managing their own discussions. Next steps included, “students think and then write down their responses to questions. This strategy allows for a more thoughtful answer and opportunity for students to justify their thinking.” During the review, students for the same teacher were observed working on differentiated leveled text passages, verbalizing their noticings, providing text-based evidence to support their viewpoint, and writing further questions to spark peer thinking on the elements of dystopian society within Brave New World.

- School leaders utilize intervisitations and one-on-one observation conferences to create professional goals and support plans, which are recorded and tracked through an online platform. Interviewed teachers unanimously stated that their observation feedback is concrete and actionable, supports to their professional goals and improves their practice, which was evident by the review of teacher observation reports. One observation report for a teacher noted developing practice in designing coherent instruction and using questioning and discussion techniques. Next steps, referred to the schoolwide instructional focus and teacher goals for fostering more writing across content areas, including the use of online resources for students “to read multiple articles that address multiple perspectives providing students an opportunity to come to their own conclusions on a topic and then challenging them to make their thinking visible [through] writing an explanation of answers and extending concepts.” A subsequent observation report, with an improved rating in planning and questioning practices, stated the lesson was “engaging students through the use of reading, writing, speaking, listening and even movement,” with low inference notes on students continuing to work past the end of the period.