Quality Review Report

2019-2020

High School for Media and Communications

High school 06M463
549 Audubon Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10040

Principal: Juan Villar

Dates of Review:
February 27, 2020 - February 28, 2020

Lead Reviewer: Edward Hazen
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

High School for Media and Communications 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

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<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 State 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 State standards and the 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>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>Developing</td>
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### 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>Additional Finding</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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<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>Area of Celebration</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 schoolwide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</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 Focus</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 State standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.3 Leveraging Resources</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
The school leader prioritizes the use of resources that align to the schoolwide instructional goals and action plans. Teacher time is structured to improve teacher collaboration and instructional capacity.

Impact
The alignment of resources to the work of teacher teams is resulting in improvements in student work products, increased teacher collaboration, and implementation of instructional strategies to increase student engagement and discourse.

Supporting Evidence

- The use of resources and other organizational decisions are aligned to and support the school's instructional goals and action plans. In its School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP), the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) prioritizes the implementation of protocols and strategies to increase opportunities for students to engage in collaborative academic tasks, high levels of discourse, and rigorous math tasks. Additionally, in its SCEP, the ILT identified the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as the most efficient means to “support curriculum design, rigorous planning, creating better assessments and feedback mechanisms to demonstrate and further accelerate our students’ learning.” As such, school leaders aligned the budget to support ongoing professional development (PD) for faculty to meet the prioritized instructional goals. A mentor teacher and an assistant principal for math support teachers in meeting the schoolwide instructional expectations. Teachers are expected to provide a learning target, utilize accountable talk structures, and include a lesson wrap-up allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of the learning target. This instructional approach was observed across classes, with teachers providing an assessment of learning to close the lesson.

- One of the annual goals in the SCEP that focuses on improving teacher collaboration states that “50 percent of teachers will have embraced the concept of the professional learning community” initiative. To accomplish this, leadership added additional preparatory periods to provide teachers with the opportunity to meet in grade level teams for common planning and collaborative inquiry. This allows the inquiry teams to meet on a regular basis to support curricula refinement and revision. Teacher teams focus on instructional work during the additional planning time, sharing best practices in pedagogy, such as adding higher-order thinking questions, scaffolds, rubrics, and checklists to engage students in challenging tasks. Across classrooms visited, some teachers elicited high levels of student discourse by utilizing effective questioning techniques and by providing scaffolds, such as accountable talk prompts, sentence frames, and visual aids, that were created during teacher collaboration time.

- A review of meeting minutes and agendas indicate that teachers’ inquiry work is focused on improving pedagogical practice and increasing levels of engagement and cognitive challenge for all students, which aligns to the SCEP instructional goals. To facilitate the implementation of PLCs and a rigorous math curriculum, the leadership team identified a mentor teacher to serve as a teacher team coach and added an assistant principal dedicated to support the math team. The additional responsibilities of the coaches include providing PD for teachers and reporting teacher development progress to the ILT. The ILT can then plan next steps for PD and teacher support and gauge progress toward meeting the school’s instructional goals.
Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, professional collaborations that align to the school’s goals of improving teaching and learning.

Impact
Professional collaborations are in place to promote teacher capacity and instructional coherence. However, not all teacher teams’ inquiry work results in improvements in teacher practice that would lead to improved student learning and performance.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher PLC teams meet weekly to focus on developing structures to improve teacher efficacy in analyzing data to make adjustments in pedagogical practices. Additionally, departmental teacher teams meet weekly to develop lessons, revise curricula to ensure accessibility for all, and identify best instructional practices to improve student engagement. For example, to meet the school vision of increasing academic discourse, there was a need to implement a student-centered, small group instructional model. The goal was to provide students with increased opportunities to engage in collaboration and discussion. To this end, teacher teams decided to adopt several, agreed upon, common strategies to use across departments and grades. While these structures were observed across classes, not all students participated equally in high levels of discussion, with some students opting not to participate in group discussions at all. This work also did not result in progress for groups of students, as evidenced by no change in the average Regents completion rate from 2018 to 2019, which remained at 37 percent.

- In the School Self Evaluation Form (SSEF), the school leadership team reports creating weekly, whole-staff PLC time for the 2019-2020 school year, in addition to regular departmental meetings, to focus on the school’s goals of “developing our staff’s capacity with data analysis and strengthening instruction” and to “discuss an array of topics, such as the process to build a community of active leaners.” An English Language Arts (ELA) team was observed meeting to discuss departmental affairs and look at student work. The meeting facilitator noted that it had been a while since the team examined student work products, so a protocol was referenced for to ensure they completed all steps. The team was able to develop next steps for lower performing students. However, since too much time was spent on housekeeping, the team did not get to examine all of the student work products they had wanted to and had to adjust the meeting to get to next steps. While teachers reported that they appreciate the collegial dialogue and guidance that the PLC has provided, including sharing of best practices, teachers noted that it has been at the expense of departmental meetings or common planning time. Some teachers noted not having sufficient time to develop and revise curricula or for co-teachers (ICTs) to create lessons to support students. Thus, the inquiry approach is developing across teams and not yet strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers.

- Teacher teams analyze student work products and assessment data to determine revisions to lesson plans or instructional groups, to identify common protocols, structures, and routines, and to improve higher-level thinking. However, this work does not typically result in improved teacher practice. For example, while these protocols were observed across the classes visited, teachers’ execution of the strategies to ensure engagement of all students in high levels of academic discourse varied. This is consistent with a review of teacher observation reports, which indicates that some teachers are still developing in using effective questioning techniques, and some teachers require further support in engaging all students in academic tasks and discussion.
Findings
Curricula are aligned to the State standards, strategically integrating literacy across grades and subjects. Rigor and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks.

Impact
There is curricular coherence across grades and subject areas that promotes college and career readiness. The school’s focus on student-centered learning results in lesson plans that require students to demonstrate rigorous habits and critical thinking in their academic tasks across disciplines.

Supporting Evidence

- The engagement of students in collaborative inquiry-based lessons through student-centered learning activities is a schoolwide instructional priority. This focus is stated in the school’s SCEP and is reflected in individual lesson plans. Similarly, the goal of implementing State standards, with a focus on promoting literacy across the curricula and the adoption of effective personal and academic habits is an identified priority when department design curricula. Consequently, the ILT and teacher teams embed engaging, real world activities into the curricula that require students to engage in collaborative projects, with an emphasis on promoting student discourse and debate. For example, an interdisciplinary English/social studies unit of study requires students to work collaboratively to create posters that reflect their opinions about the powers of the President, then work in teams to defend their arguments during a debate activity. Students reported that the courses they are required to take are rigorous, relevant, and often require collaborative work and discussion with their peers, which is preparing them for colleges and careers.

- A review of curricula indicates that higher-order thinking skills and rigorous habits are integrated in units of study and lesson plans across grade levels and content areas to promote college and career readiness for all students. School leaders ensure that teachers plan challenging, engaging, and culturally responsive instruction through the implementation of common schoolwide instructional practices. These include gallery walks, turn-and-talks, and philosophical chairs, which require students to choose a stance on a real-world controversial topic or current event and engage in a debate while referencing evidence or artifacts to support their claims. For example, students were directed to take a side on the debate over the merits of legalizing medical marijuana and cite specific text-based evidence to support their positions. Plans are reviewed by departmental teams and school leadership to ensure that these common practices are included to promote high levels of discourse. Likewise, the common expectations for lesson planning requires that teachers include literacy objectives and higher order questions and align them to the lesson objective. The purposeful decision to incorporate common instructional practices has resulted in increased curricular coherence across grades and disciplines.

- The goal for each academic department is to have students think accurately and clearly while identifying and considering multiple meanings, taking and supporting positions, and engaging in disciplined inquiry and thought. This was evident in ELA lesson plans in which students were required to collaboratively analyze several sources to write an argument and develop a counterclaim with supporting textual evidence. A review of lesson plans indicates most teachers plan lessons for a variety of learners by adjusting the curricula and identifying possible scaffolds that could be used. These include graphic organizers, visual aids and cues, instructional technology, and one-on-one teacher support.
Findings

Pedagogy is inconsistently differentiated and does not consistently use teaching strategies and protocols, such cooperative learning, questioning, accountable talk, and extended learning activities, to promote high levels of thinking and engagement.

Impact

Across grades and contents areas, teaching practices do not consistently leverage school-identified protocols to provide multiple entry points into lessons and consistently engage all students in high levels of academic discourse and challenging learning tasks. Collaborative work products and group discussions inconsistently result in all members taking responsibility of the task, with uneven levels of participation among students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the lesson, such as the use scaffolds or differentiated tasks, as well as processes or materials that would support all students in engaging in cognitively challenging tasks. While some teachers provided Universal Design for Learning (UDL) supports, such as graphic organizers or bilingual directions or prompts, these were not observed in the majority of classes visited. For example, in an ICT science lesson, all students were given the same set of materials, and all students had identical expected learning outcomes. Similarly, in a United States History class, there were no student-specific supports identified in the lesson plan or provided during the lesson. Although peer and teacher support was identified as a UDL, this was not observed. As a result, some students did not engage in do now and follow-up group discussion.

- During structured group work, the level of holding individuals accountable and the level of participation of teams in higher-order discussions varied across classrooms. In an Advanced Placement English Language class, students debated an assertion that technology has had a primarily negative impact on peoples' abilities to think critically. The majority of students responded to the discussion prompt with sufficient evidence to argue their claim. This caused other students' to either affirm with additional supporting evidence or argue with a counterclaim. Students used details from the article they had read as a class or made connections to other informational texts they had read. However, this level of engagement and participation was uneven across other classes visited. In an eleventh-grade English class, students were asked to complete a do now activity to begin the class, but not all students attempted it. In another class, when students were asked to argue if presidential elections can have a dramatic impact on the fate of the country, most students did not respond. This resulted in a largely teacher-centered discussion, even though the teacher asked several probing questions. When asked to turn-and-talk to partners, some students still did not engage in conversation with their peer, while other students were overheard discussing topics unrelated to the task.

- In an Algebra II class, students in groups were first required to use a think-ink-pair-share protocol to solve problems. They were then to collectively share their rationales for the strategy they used with their groups. All students were engaged in the activity and actively participated in the group share, thereby demonstrating their understanding of the task. In an Algebra I class, students used the same protocol to create one function and one non-function and then shared with their groups. In this instance, however, not all students completed the functions task or engaged in follow-up discourse with one another. Moreover, the non-participants were not redirected to actively participate by either the teacher or their peers. Consequently, as seen in the work products and discussions here and elsewhere, there are uneven levels of student participation across classes.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and checklists loosely aligned to the school curricula, including observation notes to monitor group work. Teachers’ assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of checks for understanding to determine students’ learning needs.

Impact

Assessment results are used to adjust curricula and instruction by some teachers but checks for understanding to determine next steps for instruction are inconsistent across classes. While teachers provide feedback to students regarding student achievement levels, student feedback does not consistently include clear or actionable next steps for improvement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use rubrics and assessments across grade levels, and some teachers have adopted the practice of taking student observation notes to monitor the level of student participation and discussion during collaborative work. However, the notes are not consistently use for student conferencing or analyzed by grade or department teams to identify patterns and trends to adjust instructional practices, thus providing limited feedback to both students and teachers regarding student achievement. In one class visited, the teacher was observed taking notes on students’ levels of participation in the assigned discussion, but the teacher reported that he was unsure of the next steps to best use the recorded data, other than to anecdotally share it with students. Similarly, students reported that the level and quality of one-on-one conferencing to identify students’ next steps for improvement varied across grades and disciplines.

- A review of student work samples indicated that some teachers provide students with actionable feedback. For example, some teachers cite an area in which students met or exceeded the criteria for proficiency on a writing rubric and an area in which the student needed to improve, including next steps. Some students indicated that the feedback helped them focus on improving their work, but they also noted that the quality of the feedback varied by content area. Additionally, students revealed that the majority of actionable feedback they received was on their writing tasks. While some of the student writing samples examined across classes had next steps that aligned to the rubric, some feedback statements were vague, such as “next time put more thought into your writing.” In math, some statements were limited to “great work” or “remember to explain your thinking.” Additionally, some students were unable to articulate how they have applied feedback from teachers, limiting their ability to identify next steps to improve their work.

- Across classrooms visited, teachers inconsistently used ongoing checks for understanding to adjust instruction to meet the needs of all students. This is consistent with a review of formal observations, which revealed that teachers inconsistently used assessments for learning or real-time checks of understanding during their instruction. In an Earth Science class, students were reviewing answers to their do now activity related to metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphism and the formation of metamorphic rocks. However, some students were confused and unable to complete the task, since many had not written anything on their do now sheets. The teacher called on mainly volunteer students to demonstrate their knowledge of metamorphi
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 leadership and faculty consistently communicate high expectations for learning to students and their families. The school's culture for learning is focused on college and career readiness expectations for all students and includes effective home-school communications.

**Impact**

Systems of advisement for students and effective communication to students and families contribute to students’ making progress towards college and career readiness goals. Family participation in the learning of their children, via school events such as curriculum nights, results in students being prepared for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and staff implement effective strategies for communicating high expectations to all families about college and career readiness to ensure that their children meet or exceed those expectations. School leaders and staff host multiple workshops that engage families in discussions about curricula and post-secondary readiness, with an emphasis on linking the rigor of students’ course workload to college and career preparedness. Likewise, guidance counselors meet regularly with students and families to ensure that students remain on track to graduate and are aware of where they are on the pathway to college readiness. Consequently, both students and parents reported that they are aware of the need to adopt critical skills and effective habits required to be successful in college, such as literacy and perseverance, as well as reaching mastery on Regents exams to be deemed college ready. Moreover, parents reported that their children are continually supported by school staff to ensure that they stay on track to graduate.

- To support students’ progress toward high expectations, school leaders and staff provide multiple provisions for success, including after school tutoring, Saturday Regents preparatory classes, and academic support during school breaks. Students reported that extracurricular academic tutoring opportunities are well attended and expressed appreciation that students at-risk of not meeting expectations are eligible to receive mentoring and additional, targeted personal academic support. As a result of the high expectations set for them and the support students get, the four-year graduation rate increased from 61 percent in 2018 to 69 percent in 2019.

- The accepted schoolwide expectation is for all students to prepare for college by achieving mastery on Regents exams. Students reported that staff encourage them to take Regents multiple times to reach mastery so that they are deemed college and career ready, as measured by the New York State College and Career Readiness Index (CRI). To this end, students are provided with individualized Regents score reports so that they know what skills require improvement to reach mastery level. Students stated that they are aware of the school’s expectations to reach mastery to avoid having to take remedial classes when they enroll in college. Parents reported that their children are showing ownership of preparing for college by being mindful of the quality of their work. For example, parents stated that their children are diligent about working toward an Advanced Regents diploma by studying continually and applying teachers' feedback. Students reported that they regularly monitor their progress using the online grading system and noted that meeting regularly with the guidance counselor requires them to be keenly aware of their progress towards meeting academic goals and graduation requirements. The school leaders and faculty pushing all students to reach mastery level of relevant standards and assessments resulted in a 12 percent increase in the percentage of students deemed college-ready, from 17 percent in 2018 to 29 percent in 2019, as measured by the CRI.