Quality Review Report

2019-2020

Hillcrest High School
High school 28Q505
160-05 Highland Avenue
Queens
NY 11432

Principal: Scott Milczewski

Dates of Review:
February 26, 2020 - February 27, 2020

Lead Reviewer: Jerry Brito
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

Hillcrest 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</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>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>Developing</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
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<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>
</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>
<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 schoolwide 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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The school's approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by a theory of action that focuses on maintaining a safe school environment. Structures are in place so that each student is known well by at least one adult.

Impact

Students benefit from a safe environment that is inclusive, respectful, and meaningfully involves their voice. Grade-level teams, known as task forces, support students in their attendance, social-emotional growth, and academic behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Each month, the principal puts out a cultural diversity message to the school community. In a February message, the school community was provided a brief history behind Black history month. The message also included a current student's explanation of the importance of Black history month to him as an African American living in the United States. In addition, a student team known as the Council for Unity creates and facilitates initiatives that promote inclusion across the school community. In a recent session, team members collected inspiring messages from school members and shared them with students and staff across the school. The Council for Unity also oversees lessons centered on inclusion and tolerance. In one lesson, students were given different scenarios centered on teaching empathy for others. During a meeting, all students agreed that the school community is welcoming, celebrates all cultures in the school, and students play a critical role in promoting diversity across the school.

- School leadership and staff prioritize school safety by implementing protocols to prevent and mitigate safety issues. For example, juniors mentor freshman through a peer mentoring program with the goal of showing them the personal behaviors needed to be successful in the school. In addition, the school's crisis response team, which consists of school leadership and guidance counselors, meets regularly to discuss how to address students who are struggling emotionally in order to mitigate adverse behaviors, which includes providing mental health resources to both students and their families. Also, school leadership and deans have developed a protocol that enables hallways to be cleared quickly when students are moving to their next class, which reduces behavioral incidents. During a meeting, school leadership stated that they use a variety of systems to create a safe school environment. A review of suspension data shows a reduction in student suspensions over a three-year period.

- Teachers meet regularly in grade-level teams known as Task Forces, which are focused on addressing emotional and attendance issues to ensure students meet graduation requirements. In a twelfth-grade task force meeting, team members reviewed students who were on track to receive advanced diplomas. The discussion centered on different strategies to ensure students meet graduation requirements, including academic support from online platforms and ensuring high attendance is maintained. During a meeting, students stated that there are structures that allow them to have contact with adults in the building and they felt safe talking to them about social and emotional issues impacting their school performance.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum  
Rating: Developing

Findings

Rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all students are inconsistently emphasized across units and lesson plans. However, curricular documents are beginning to reflect planning to provide diverse learners access to the curricula.

Impact

Curricular documents with an inconsistent emphasis on well-planned rigorous instruction do not yet meet the needs of all students, thus limiting their ability to access the curricula.

Supporting Evidence

- In an English Language Arts (ELA) unit plan, students are tasked with learning the importance of literary elements such as point-of-view by studying texts such as *The Cask of Amontillado*. The plan provides a variety of suggested learning objectives such as identifying and explaining characterization techniques in short stories. It also provides a list of suggested activities related to areas such as language mechanics, research, and informative writing. In a math unit plan, students are expected to learn about quadratic equations. Over a series of lessons, the plan emphasizes focus learning areas such as interpreting a mathematical representation using the rate of change and creating equivalent quadratic equations. These two-unit plans and others reviewed demonstrate little evidence that rigorous habits and higher-order skills are required so that multilingual learners (MLLs) and students with disabilities can access the content aligned with their academic needs.

- In an English writing lesson plan, student groups are expected to conduct an oral presentation on the sequence of events from the summary of texts such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The lesson plan called for a review of what is needed in an oral presentation, including speaking clearly and organization. Students used handouts to facilitate completion of the task such as sequencing sentences in the proper order. In a Global History lesson plan, students are learning about the conditions that led to the beginning of the Cold War. The lesson plan presents a generalized description of student activities, including when groups are to share out and when students will be asked questions. For differentiation, the plan states that the teacher will prepare various groups for their presentations. A review of lesson plans demonstrates a lack of emphasis on students engaging in tasks that are rigorous and require the use of higher-order skills by all groups of students.

- In a health unit plan, which is planned for three lessons, students are learning the relationship between poor health habits and common chronic disease. The plan outlines three learning objectives to be covered, including analyzing the behavioral and environmental risk factors that contribute to chronic disease. In addition, the plan briefly states the areas for student activities such as annotation and class discussion. Differentiation is noted in the plan by listing potential strategies such as using multimedia presentations and employing heterogeneous learning pairs. A review of lesson plans across grades and content areas shows inconsistent planning of activities to allow all students to access the content. Consequently, unit plans and lesson plans do not consistently ensure that student subgroups are cognitively engaged.
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs centered on student discussion that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In addition, students are engaged in creating meaningful work products.

Impact

Students produce meaningful work products that demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and emphasize a focus on student discussion. In a tenth-grade English class, students were learning to determine a character’s personality by analyzing his or her words and actions by reading *The Lottery*. Working in groups, students were tasked with discussing and noting the character traits for the main character using the Diamond discussion protocol, which requires group members to come to consensus in their analysis. Each student had access to a listening and speaking rubric and an accountable talk chart to facilitate group discussions. In an eleventh-grade history class, students were analyzing the reasons why American industrialists were characterized as robber barons or captains of industry. Student groups were analyzing historical texts such as an excerpt of a biography of Andrew Carnegie. Group discussion was guided by a historical detective protocol, which focuses on research and argumentation. Each group wrote down their findings, which will be shared out to the rest of the class. A review of classroom practices show that student discussions are facilitated by the use of discussion protocols.

- In a ninth-grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) classroom, students were tasked with factoring binomials by first identifying the greatest common factor and using the rules for dividing polynomials. Working in groups, students were engaged in the think-pair-share protocol to discuss the connection between factoring and the distributive property. The discussion required students to refer to their notes from previous lessons. A designated speaker presented each group’s findings to the rest of the class. In an eleventh-grade English class, students were tasked with analyzing the ideas of feminism lite, sexism, and language through their reading of the book *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. Using a jigsaw discussion protocols, students worked in designated expert groups in which they discussed and different focused questions. At the teacher’s direction, students returned to their home groups to share their discussions from their expert groups. During a meeting, all students agreed that they engage in discussion during group work in all of their classes.

- In a twelfth-grade Advanced Placement Chemistry laboratory class, students were conducting an experiment in which they used a calorimeter to measure the transfer of heat from hot metals to water. On the board, the teacher presented a diagram explaining how to set up the equipment for the experiment. Students worked in teams of four on the experiment, which required that each group member participate for its successful completion. During the experiment, students made observations and wrote them down in a laboratory report template. Working collaboratively, students used the data collected to determine heat transfer using a mathematical equation. A review of classroom practices across grades and subjects shows that tasks are designed so that students can demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation.
Additional Finding

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

Across classrooms, teachers use or create rubrics and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school’s curricula. Teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Use of loosely aligned rubrics does not result in teachers consistently providing actionable feedback to students regarding their achievement. Teachers’ ability to consistently make effective adjustments is limited, thereby not meeting all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use an assessment model that is meant to focus on strengths and a next step that aligns with a content-specific rubric. In an English assignment, students produced a poster that made claims based on text evidence from the story *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe. Posters were rated based on a five-point rubric evaluating claim, evidence, and poster creativity. One student was complimented by the teacher for doing excellent work. As a next step, it was suggested that the poster could have used more decorations. In a Spanish writing assignment, students were tasked with writing a brief autobiography focused on their school and family life. The assignment was graded using a four-point rubric centered on task completion, organization, vocabulary, and structure. For one student, the teacher provided an overall numerical grade of fourteen out of sixteen possible points. The only written feedback that was provided to the student was ¡Bien! (good). A review of teachers’ written feedback to students revealed that teachers inconsistently offer actionable feedback, and that when offered, the quality of actionable feedback varied.

- In a history assignment, students were expected to produce a journal entry from the perspective of a colonist or Native American dealing with issues at the Plymouth or Jamestown colonies. Student work was rated using a four-point rubric looking at areas such as accurate use of historical dates. For one student, the teacher complimented her by stating that she is an amazing writer in capturing emotion, tone, perspective, creating a vivid picture of Native American struggles, and her ability in analyzing the text. There were no next steps noted in the overall feedback. In a science assignment, students were tasked with writing about the properties of diseases such as diabetes in the form of a wanted poster. An analysis of this assignment found that a rubric was not used to evaluate the work. The feedback given was one- or two-word phrases such as “love it” and “nice drawing”. During a meeting, all students agreed that they get either written or verbal feedback from teachers. However, not all students could cite examples of actionable feedback to highlights their next learning steps.

- In an Advanced Placement Calculus class, students were learning how to use a trapezoidal sum to approximate the area under a curve. While students were working in groups, the teacher moved around and checked in on their progress. The teacher did not alter her lesson based on her check-ins, thus missing an opportunity to effectively monitor understanding to drive her instruction. In an ecology test, one student self-assessed his performance by noting the answers he got wrong, the right answer, and an explanation why the correct answer is correct. This analysis did not demonstrate the reason why the student got the answers wrong. A review of classroom practices and student work reveals an inconsistent use of checks for understanding and student self-assessment across classrooms.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations
Rating: Proficient

Findings

High expectations are consistently conveyed to the entire staff through structures such as professional development (PD) sessions. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations to families that are connected to a path to college and career readiness for their children.

Impact

School leadership provision of training to staff and a system of accountability results in sharing high expectations. School staff helps families understand their children’s progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership communicates high expectations to the staff through various means. For example, the principal sends out a weekly email to inform staff about academic and operational happenings for the following week. In a January email, the principal informed staff members of an upcoming senior task force meeting to discuss the team’s restructuring to best address seniors’ academic needs, including Regents results and credit gaps, as they prepare for graduation. In addition, school leadership communicates high expectations to staff through the school policy handbook. The handbook details the school’s academic and operational foundations, including a description of the roles of various staff members such as the assistant principals and expectations centered on student work products. A review of documents reveals that school leadership consistently convey high expectations to the staff.

- School leadership uses PD sessions to communicate academic expectations. PD sessions are structured so that teachers collaboratively develop model lesson plans focused on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In a January session, teachers were focusing on furthering developing their instructional practices centered on questioning and discussion strategies. The session had teachers work collaboratively on applying discussion protocols such as fishbowl and traveling partners. Teachers also worked on questioning techniques. In a December PD session, teachers were introduced to Advance Literacies, a citywide, research-based literacy initiative. The PD session reviewed such areas as the reason for revisions of State standards and determining the needs of a diversity of learners. A review of documents, including the school PD calendar, shows that high expectations are communicated through how PD sessions are planned and implemented. During a meeting, teachers agreed that the collaborative nature of PD sessions allows them to understand school leadership’s expectations.

- School leadership and staff communicate high expectations to parents through a variety of means. For example, teachers set aside time once a week to engage with parents using emails, telephone conferences, and face-to-face meetings regarding their children’s academic performance and how best to support them at home. In addition, parents of students who are identified as needing social and emotional support are regularly contacted about meetings to discuss strategies that can be employed to help them at school and home. Also, the school’s college office conducts workshops for parents to help them prepare their children for the academic and financial requirements of college. The office offers a financial aid night in which parents are taught about the different types of financial aid available for college. The office also offers tutorials on the importance of key exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test. During a meeting, parents agreed that they are given opportunities to communicate with teachers and participate in workshops that help them understand their children’s academic progress.
Additional Finding

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

Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations focused on addressing gaps on State tests. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teacher voice is noted in key decisions.

Impact
Department teams conduct inquiry cycles that result in increased teacher capacity. Teacher leadership results in them having a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Department teams meet to analyze formative assessment data, which is used to inform changes in their instructional practices. In a January English department meeting, team members were analyzing the results of a mock English Regents common assessment and determining their next instructional steps. Team members focused on a group of students who scored below expected benchmarks in alignment with New York State Regents requirements. In analyzing the data, it was determined that focus students struggled with reading comprehension questions. The team came to consensus on next steps, which included modifications to curricula centered on providing students reading passages similar to past Regents exams, sustained silent reading time, and the creation of a strategy tool kit focused on reading comprehension and multiple-choice strategies. A review of department team agendas and minutes reveals a focus on analyzing formative assessment data to target groups of students and adjust instructional practices.

- In a December science department meeting, team members were analyzing the results of formative assessment focused on chemistry, earth science, and living environment, which are topic areas aligned to the State Regents exams. Team members focused on a group of students who performed below expected benchmark levels. An analysis of the results showed several gap areas, including balancing chemical equations, understanding the scientific method, and knowing the primary sources of energy. Team members agreed to certain strategies to address the learning gaps, which included test-taking strategies and modeling of concepts. In a December social studies department meeting, teachers were reviewing the results of formative assessment data centered on United States history and Global history. For certain student groups, learning gaps were evident in areas such as map skills, vocabulary identification, and cause and effect. Team members agreed to focus on strategies such as crafting specific questions to address the cited learning gaps. During a meeting, teachers agreed that they focus on student performance data to inform implementation of instructional strategies.

- The PD planning committee, which includes teacher leaders from across the school, regularly meets to discuss academic initiatives that impact student performance and build coherence. For example, the committee worked collaboratively with school leadership this year to develop a comprehensive grading policy. Also, there is a teacher team that works on developing lesson plans to build cohesion across grades and departments. In addition, teachers on all teams have the opportunity to take on a leadership role facilitating the teams’ work. During a teacher meeting, it was expressed that the role of the teacher leaders is important to run the various teams in the school. They agreed that their voice is taken into account when decisions are made by school leadership.