

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**High School of Language and Innovation**

**High School X509**

**925 Astor Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10469**

**Principal: Julie Nariman**

**Date of review: January 9, 2015**

**Lead Reviewer: Carron Staple**

## The School Context

High School of Language and Innovation is a high school with 354 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 15% Black, 58% Hispanic, 11% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 73% English Language Learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 91.4%.

## School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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.	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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.	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

### School Culture

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations.	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

### Systems for Improvement

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning.	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based collaborations that promote the Common Core Learning Standards and have key leadership roles that focus on improved student learning and pedagogy through systematic analysis of instruction, data, and student work.

### Impact

Inquiry work and distributed leadership has strengthened teacher collaborations resulting in school-wide instructional coherence, effective teacher leadership, and improvement in teacher pedagogy and student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- All teacher teams are involved in structured, inquiry-based collaborations. Teachers meet weekly in their respective teams to work on their practice, analyze student work, and discuss specific instructional strategies within the Learning Cultures' model of this English Language Learners school, and to ensure collaborations improve their practice and progress toward student goals. Some teachers stated that because of meeting regularly they have seen growth in their own planning, especially to align curricula and instruction with instructional shifts and Common Core Learning Standards, plus in the areas of differentiation and introducing elements of the Learning Cultures model. Additionally, the principal provided Advance-tracker data to show evidence of teachers improving in competencies of the Danielson *Framework for Learning*, specifically around questioning (3b), engagement of students (3c), and assessment (3d).
- During an English department grade team meeting for several grades, teachers used a student work examination protocol to review a student's work. Teachers discussed what the student did well and struggled with in his writing task, to help him more fully establish tone and characterization. Each team member shared strategies they could use to help this student and all students who fit the same archetype. They discussed re-teaching classes about diction and its impact on tone and meaning.
- During both teacher team meetings, teachers spoke about having a have a strong voice in making school-wide decisions and meeting weekly to discuss school-wide and/or team goals to ensure coherence and consistency. There are three major teacher teams, department teams, grade teams, and professional learning communities (PLCs), which drive support for teachers and students. The department teams collaborate to write syllabi and unit plans that ensure literacy activities are central in content courses with consistency across classes. The grade teams examine student work to identify characteristics or trends of an individual or group to determine where support is needed. Teachers brainstorm to make adjustments, decide actions to take, and execute unified team action plans. PLCs meet weekly to engage in analyzing lesson plans, student work, and debrief intervisitations of their colleagues' classes. They discuss findings and prepare feedback for the teachers visited, which teachers agreed is helpful in improving their own practice.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teacher practices include questioning and scaffolds, but multiple entry points, levels of student discussion, and work products are uneven. Some teachers struggle to align the school community's belief of how students learn best.

### Impact

Teaching practices are inconsistently implemented concerning the school's instructional beliefs about how students learn best as informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. This results in some teachers unevenly ensuring that all students are involved in appropriately challenging tasks or discussions that yield high-level work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- In all classrooms visited it is clear that most teachers plan well and engage in pedagogy aligned to the Danielson *Framework*, have adopted the Learning Cultures model, and use elements of it, such as unison reading, responsibility groups, the share, and learning conferences. These Learning Culture elements promote higher-order thinking skills and help students master the English language as they learn skills and content necessary to pass classes and Regents exams. Clear evidence that this model is working with some students can be seen in the Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) data from 2013-14, teacher ratings, and student growth from New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Test (NYSESLAT) scores, and Regents exam results.
- While the Learning Cultures model specifically creates strategies for teachers to use with students, there were some classes where student engagement and participation was low and where questioning remained at a low-level. In one Earth Science class, the teacher stated, "Today we are going to learn how slope affects runoff". The teacher then showed a rock and stated, "It's a flow of water on what? Fill in the blank." "What does slope mean?" Students remained silent and only one student raised his hand to answer. Students were not collaborating in writing, taking notes, or having discussions even though they were sitting together at tables, they worked independently. In a Living Environment class, the teacher showed a PowerPoint about photosynthesis. No notes were distributed nor did students take notes or have a discussion. When a student asked, "What happens when we eat lettuce?" the teacher stated, "We get energy." The teacher answered the question directly and the student missed the opportunity to discuss it with his peers or try to answer himself based on the PowerPoint he just viewed. Consequently, students in both classes were not challenged to either demonstrate their knowledge in their discussions or work products, which is contrary to the goal of the Learning Cultures model.
- Teachers check-in individually with students and provide one-to-one support. Yet, in some classes observed, teachers spent the bulk of their time conferencing without any direct instruction or extensions offered to the whole class, where some early-finishers had to wait for further directions as the teacher concentrated on other students. Additionally, student-centered unison reading activities had all the students in the responsibility groups reading aloud with no one person leading the pace of the readers, the pronunciation of words, or the comprehension of text. While this student-centered activity is meant to support fluency and communication, group check-ins with the teacher were minimal, resulting in missed opportunities for students to achieve the session's reading goals.

## Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Curricula across grades and subject are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricular and instructional refinements are made using student work and data.

### Impact

The school's purposeful curricular decisions build coherence and promote cognitive engagement and college and career readiness for a variety of learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula shows evidence of coherence in planning across all grades and subjects. All teachers incorporate some aspect of the Learning Cultures model as part of their daily planning and almost all teachers utilize Cooperative Unison Reading, where small groups of students read aloud in sync to help support language fluency and comprehension. Further, the principal provided curricula maps, unit plans, and lesson plans that have been revised based on student work and data.
- Curricula across grades reflect the use of the Learning Cultures model, which frames and includes tasks that support all students learning via language that is not native to them. Learning Cultures is a curriculum development model based on the idea that all students can succeed in college and careers if they learn to take responsibility for their own learning. Tasks include daily discussions, reading a variety of texts in every class, building knowledge with peers, and accessing a rich variety of resources and materials. For example, all unit plans include collaborative learning where students are required to engage in either role-play, debates, presentations, or discussions of their reflections and enduring understandings.
- A review of teacher lesson plans shows evidence that teachers are planning summative tasks where students have opportunities to show mastery of skills and content that emphasize higher-order thinking skills, such as developing logical arguments and using text-based evidence to defend claims or counter-claims. Teacher plans also incorporate various literacy formats of the Learning Cultures model. For example, some lesson plans for literacy block instruction, provide opportunities for direct and small group instruction, and independent work or student-generated research. The curricula provide opportunities for students to choose topics and genres for some of their writing pieces, and independent texts they wish to read for enrichment, based on their ability or interest.

**Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers create common assessments and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subjects. Teachers' assessment practices consistently utilize on-going checks for understanding and students engage in peer and self-assessment.

**Impact**

Teachers' assessment practices provide timely and actionable feedback to students, to make effective adjustments to curricula and instruction, and to meet the students' varying learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across classrooms all teachers use rubrics to provide assessment criteria for student work. For example, in a geometry class students were asked to solve various dilations of figures. Initially, they worked alone to try to solve the problems and then moved into responsibility groups, where they worked as a team to discuss their answers, ultimately solving the problems collectively. The teacher then pushed them further to find even more solutions using a geometry assessment rubric as a guide. After bringing the whole class together, the teacher listened carefully as students shared their thinking with the class as to how they problem-solved, then she made on-the-spot assessments using their rubric to support students with any breakdown within the problem-solving process.
- In most classrooms, teachers share the same rubric for student presentations and argumentative writing. However, across the school common assessments include, pre- and post-tests, learning conferences, whole class share, peer assessment, and self-assessment. Current school data as compared to last year reveals that more students are engaged in the Learning Culture strategies and have improved their skills in reading, writing, and speaking as evidenced by NYSESLAT scores, teacher assessments, scholarship reports, and Regents data.
- Formative assessments for checking for understanding and learning are embedded throughout lessons and happen in a variety of ways. For example, the responsibility group is one strategy observed that provides students an opportunity for peer assessment and to discuss and share their work using a set rubric. Another strategy observed is one-to-one check-ins by the teacher, where students receive feedback on work submitted, are working on, or something the teacher observed during the responsibility groups. These assessment strategies allow for immediate teacher support and feedback to students, resulting in better work products that meet or exceed rubric standards. Additionally, teachers have revised their instruction by assessing students to support the development of communicative skills, specifically, the five major components of language: vocabulary, syntax, morphological, pragmatic, and phonological skill. Students are assessed on understanding the meaning of words, how to appropriately use these components of language, the awareness of syllables and sounds, and the social rules of using certain words when communicating. This revised instructional support helps English Language Learners in mastering these skills to meet the challenges of responding orally and in writing when taking school and state exams.

**Findings**

High expectations are communicated to staff verbally and in writing, via the use of the Danielson *Framework for Learning*. Administrators and teaching staff consistently communicate with students and their families to support student progress and expectations connected to college and career readiness.

**Impact**

School leaders provide instructional support and professional learning opportunities to staff, as well as have a system of accountability for those high expectations. The consistent communication and collaboration among school staff, students, and families fosters high expectations for all, provides ongoing feedback to help families understand student progress.

**Supporting Evidence**

- By engaging staff in post-classroom observation debriefs that tie actionable feedback aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* focus areas, student achievement with deadlines, support, training, and assessment, high expectations are communicated for practice and follow-up. Professional Development on a weekly basis, and daily teacher team meetings creates a culture of mutual accountability that strengthens school initiatives, communication, and overall school culture.
- The school has established partnerships with families to support progress towards college and career readiness. For example, there is a curriculum night where the principal, teachers, and guidance staff collaborate with parents about how the school prepares students for college and the methods and strategies used to support students. There is also a senior night where parents come together to discuss pathways to college and learn about the entire college application process, including financial aid, and the guidance team's one-to-one planning conferences to support each senior.
- Parents specifically spoke about the constant feedback received from the school to inform them of their children's progress toward graduation, through several sources such as an online grading system, monthly conferences and meetings, phone calls, letters, and an open-door policy. Parents spoke positively about the school's principal, teachers, and support staff, as they were very clear in preparing their children for college and beyond, citing the course work and the depth of writing assignments where students are required to show mastery and understanding. Students reported that teachers require them to complete rigorous work and this makes them feel confident that they are being prepared for college.