



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Liberty High School  
Academy for Newcomers**

**High School M550**

**250 West 18 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10011**

**Principal: Rhonda Huegel**

**Date of review: November 25, 2014**

**Reviewer: Eva Ostrum**

## The School Context

Liberty is a high school with 401 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 27.1% Black, 43.7% Hispanic, 12.7% White, and 16.2% Asian students. The student body includes 94.1% English language learners and 2.7% special education students. Boys account for 64% of the students enrolled and girls account for 36%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 - 2014 was 86.9%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</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>Focus</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</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>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training to support growth towards those expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicate and partner with families to support students on their path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

Clear expectations regarding professionalism, instruction, and communication aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and professional development supports result in a culture of mutual accountability. A system of reciprocal communication with parents results in partnerships that support student progress towards expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal has created teacher teams, and trained staff in using protocols to look at student work to inform curriculum and instruction. Consistent with the Danielson Framework for Teaching, teachers reflect both individually and collaboratively on their teaching. Teachers confirmed that this ongoing practice has set a high standard of professionalism for them, and has resulted in growth in their practice. Teachers stated, “We feel like we’re all on board in moving to academic rigor”, “We are moving in a very positive direction”, “We have more forward momentum now than in the past”, “We help each other”. Teachers attributed this positive direction to school leadership. A teacher shared, “The principal’s level of expectation is high, especially with this kind of work and curricula. We are rising to the challenge.”
- The school continually engages in reflective professional development that supports teachers in improving their pedagogy. For example, as school leaders felt it was important to discuss the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DtF) as a reflective tool that teachers could use to improve their practice, the faculty used the *Last Word Protocol* to read and share thoughts on the rationale and explanation in the DtF.
- Parents shared that the school effectively communicates and partners with families around preparation for college and career. Parents cited Parent Teacher Association meetings that prepare them to support their children in the college application and financial aid process. The school assigned a parent coordinator with the responsibility to implement systems and structures to expand the partnership with parents. Parents on the School Leadership Team (SLT) have taken the lead on determining how to spend Title I funding. They have chosen to focus on the overarching theme of “How can we motivate students?” to support student college and career readiness.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

### Impact

As teachers align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standard, integrate the instructional shifts, and embed rigor in curricula and tasks across grades and subjects and for English language learners, college and career readiness is promoted for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- The English as a second language (ESL) department has developed a curriculum for grades 9 -12. This curriculum emphasizes writing to support English language development and fluency for the school's population of English language learners. Recently, the ESL department revised the curriculum to ensure that all tasks emphasize rigorous habits across grades.
- All teachers use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) in planning their curricula. Across classrooms, teachers display the SIOP objective, academic vocabulary, and an agenda on the board as supports for students. These curricular supports appear visibly in every classroom in the school, and guide students in following the lesson and in accessing curricular materials in English.
- Lessons consistently incorporate higher-order and rigorous thinking skills for all learners, English language learners and students with disabilities. For example, a science lesson plan on meiosis included an explanatory text on meiosis and a mini-glossary and graphic organizers to engage all learners in the rigorous task.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices were aligned to the curricula and reflected a set of beliefs about how students work best informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student participation.

### Impact

As a result of coherent teaching practices, student engagement in higher-order thinking promotes student growth towards goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers incorporated consistent strategies to promote student-to-student discussion, based on the belief that dialogue and interaction builds English language acquisition. For example, in a science class, students worked in groups as they read the expository text and answered questions on meiosis. In a math classroom, students worked in groups to collaboratively solve a set of equations. A representative from each student group then presented the group's solutions to the class for critique.
- Across classrooms, teachers incorporated consistent strategies to promote student writing and discussion of their writing. In an art class, students wrote their responses to the question, "What is the difference between a foundation (base) and a background?" In an English language arts class lesson on the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students wrote a response to the question, "Which character stands up for what he or she believes in?" The teacher then asked students to share their written responses to the class.
- Across classrooms, students demonstrated active participation in their learning. Students in every class were observed working on the assigned task, and asked questions of peers or the teacher when they did not understand something. Meetings with parents confirmed this observation. One parent noted that she was pleased to see how engaged her daughter is in her learning. Another parent described the motivation her daughter demonstrates in completing her schoolwork.

**Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers collaborate to create common assessments, use rubrics to share actionable feedback with students, and use conferencing and exit slips to check for understanding.

**Impact**

Teacher use of data analysis from assessments, classroom instruction, and student work informs curricula revisions and effective instructional adjustments. Students receive actionable feedback that they can use to improve their work.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher rubrics and comments consistently provided balanced feedback and actionable next steps, and included specific suggestions for how to improve the next round of work. For example, in a science class, teacher comments on a students' work informed the student that he needed to add labels on a diagram of a food chain to the next draft of his assignment. In an art history class, teacher comments on a rubric communicated to a student that his next steps included adding citations for the included quotations and references.
- The faculty analyzes data from Regents and course pass rates to identify gaps in understanding. In addition, teachers collaboratively design assessments and rubrics, and use data analysis to refine curricula and instruction. For example, the science department is in the process of designing midterms for their courses. Departments also review results of assessments together to determine areas of need. This analysis informs the teachers' next instructional steps. One teacher commented that after looking at assessment results together, the team evaluates their practice and incorporates changes to meet student learning needs.
- Across classrooms, teachers consistently use varied checks for understanding and make effective instructional adjustments. For example, across classrooms, students complete exit slips as they leave class. Teachers then use those exit slips to determine what they might need to reteach the next day. Teachers regularly engage in individual conferencing with students, as evidenced in a science class when the teacher circulated around the room and conferenced with each student group. Teachers also gauge student understanding by listening to student dialogue. This was observed in a social studies class as students worked in groups, and in a math lesson when students presented their solutions to their peers.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributive leadership structures empower teachers to create curriculum by department.

### **Impact**

Teachers assume ownership in refining curricula and instruction based on the inquiry work that they do in teams, strengthening their professional capacity. These refinements impact student learning, increasing students' access to rigor and achievement for all learners.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Inquiry teams engage in 5-week cycles of looking at student work and then using the results to refine curricula. For each cycle, one teacher brings student work and data to the team. The team uses protocols, such as the *Notice and Wonder Protocol*, to provide feedback. The presenting teacher implements the feedback, and then brings new rounds of student work back to the team for analysis and further feedback. The team then presents to the whole faculty on their process and their group findings. One teacher noted that the inquiry cycle encouraged her to think about the difference between on-the-spot writing versus the drafting process. The teacher then restructured writing assignments as a result of the inquiry cycle. This teacher stated that she could see the growth in student work as a result of the process.
- Revision of lesson plans and curricula extends beyond individual teachers to entire departments. For example, the English as a second language team spoke about revising the department's curriculum as a result of the inquiry cycle they had gone through together. Teachers stated that, "This was more structured as a group" and, "When we think together it helps a lot."
- Taking on the responsibility for creating and revising curriculum invests teachers with leadership responsibility in the school. A teacher shared that, "We feel like we assume leadership responsibility as a result of developing and revising curricula".