Department of
Education
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

# Quality Review Report

# 2017-2018

**Newtown High School**

**High school 24Q455**

**48-01 90 Street**
**Queens**
**NY 11373**

**Principal: John Ficalora**

**Dates of Review:**
**March 6, 2018 and March 8, 2018**

**Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier**

# 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

Newtown 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 | | |
|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school...* | **Area** | **Rating** |
| 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 | **Additional Finding** | **Proficient** |
| 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 | **Additional Finding** | **Proficient** |
| 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 | **Area of Focus** | **Developing** |

# School Quality Ratings continued

## School Culture

| To what extent does the school... | Area | Rating |
|---|---|---|
| 1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults | **Additional Finding** | **Proficient** |
| 3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations | **Area of Celebration** | **Well Developed** |

## Systems for Improvement

| To what extent does the school... | Area | Rating |
|---|---|---|
| 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 | **Additional Finding** | **Well Developed** |
| 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 | **Additional Finding** | **Proficient** |
| 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 | **Additional Finding** | **Developing** |
| 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning | **Additional Finding** | **Proficient** |
| 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 | **Additional Finding** | **Proficient** |

## Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |
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**Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning.

**Impact**

Systematic communication around high expectations establishes a culture of mutual accountability. Students develop ownership of post-high school next-steps through an advisory program and the school's Small Learning Community (SLC) organization.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations through a document entitled "High Expectations, Everyday, Every Classroom", which contains information connected to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Sections of this resource make clear the schoolwide expectations regarding establishing and maintaining a positive classroom environment, designing instruction that engages all students, purposefully grouping students, checking for student understanding, and facilitating cooperative learning activities. High expectations for instructional design that includes higher-order thinking questions and multiple entry points so that different learners within the same classroom will have access to the curricula are also covered. Additionally, high expectations are addressed and subsequently reinforced during whole-staff and department meetings.

- Mutual accountability lives within the school as evidenced by teachers' reliance on each other to lead and facilitate SLCs and the professional development (PD) designed and delivered within those structures. Additionally, teachers assign each other to be mentors to the students identified as needing increased support. Teachers also shared that they feel free to share concerns with school leadership and expect that their issues will be addressed. For example, when teachers requested that there be a change to the design of PD and the cycles in which PD was delivered, school leaders worked with teachers to make appropriate changes.

- Teams and staff establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations through venues such as report card conferencing, which occurs each time official report cards are distributed. All students meet with a teacher who reviews all of the student's grades and goals, action planning next steps, and intervention strategies that may be appropriate. Students praised this process, all agreeing with one student who shared, "It's great to review my report card with a teacher who I don't already work with. Gives me fresh eyes and ideas. Helps me focus on owning what I need to do." In addition, all grade-nine students are programmed for an advisory class during which they engage in activities that heighten their awareness of the expectations they must meet in order to get into, and succeed in, college and career. At the end of grade nine, students attend an SLC fair at which each career-themed SLC makes a presentation so that students can make an informed choice as to which SLC they will enter once they become a tenth-grade student. SLCs focus on careers such as business, math and forensics, and engineering. One student shared, "The SLCs are a beautiful opportunity. I had an interest in engineering but never had an opportunity to explore it. Now I can explore it and understand my interest."

## Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**

Common assessments are in place but are inconsistently used to measure student progress. Teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

**Impact**

The effectiveness of instructional adjustments based on common assessment data is not currently measurable as documented. Teachers' ability to consistently make effective adjustments is limited, thereby not meeting all students' learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Math teachers purposefully integrate math skills using middle school level math in order to address current students' struggles with algebra based on assessment data and findings after analyzing student work. English Language Arts (ELA) teachers found that students were having difficulty answering multiple-choice questions as well as effectively responding to argumentative essay prompts. To strengthen students' ability to answer these questions, each marking period culminates in a Common Core Learning Standards based writing project. English as a New Language (ENL) teachers design assessments that are aligned to Regents exams and the New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Test. Analysis of common assessment data resulted in the determination that students were struggling with academic vocabulary. ENL teachers have met with core content teachers to create lists of academic vocabulary students need to know in order to succeed.

- While there is evidence that teachers are using the data from common assessments to adjust instruction, no evidence was provided to show how data is tracked in such a way that would make clear how students are progressing toward goals.

- While teachers were circulating throughout classrooms and checking-in with individuals and student groups, effective adjustments to classroom instruction were inconsistent. In a math class, the teacher instructed students to utilize an online platform that provided real-time data as to students' understanding of a topic covered on the previous night's homework. The teacher re-taught the concept, followed by questioning the class as to which students still did not understand. The lesson moved to the next step after two students responded that they had a better understanding of the topic. In another class, the teacher assigned students to work on a problem for three minutes. The teacher missed an opportunity to adjust instruction after a majority of the class completed the problem in less than half the time and then sat without any task to work on.

| **Quality Indicator:** | **1.1 Curriculum** | **Rating:** | **Proficient** |
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**Findings**

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts with an emphasis on the use of text-based evidence. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and class-based data.

**Impact**

Curricula promote college and career readiness for all students. Adjustments to material and the tools students use during instruction ensure access and engagement for diverse learners

**Supporting Evidence**

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence consistent alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and integration with the instructional shifts. Evidence of integration of the instructional shift focused on grounding reading and writing in text can be seen in multiple lesson plans. For example, a grade-ten global lesson plan indicates that students will gather, use, and interpret evidence in support of arguments over the different causes of the Cold War and its impact on the Soviet Union, the United States, and their respective allies. An Advanced Placement World History lesson plan indicates that students are to prepare text-based answers required during a Socratic seminar about the benefits and detriments to imperial empires. In a grade-ten ELA lesson plan, students are to search for evidence that will support their claim about whether Brutus or Caesar was the tragic hero in *Julius Caesar*. Similarly, a grade-eleven ELA lesson plan includes an activity that requires the identification of thematic threads in *The Crucible* and support of those findings with textual evidence.

- The instructional shift focused on deepening students' understanding of math concepts is also evident in curricular documents. An algebra lesson plan indicates that students must write and speak about their understanding of the relationship between multiplication and division and explain why division by zero is undefined. Students must explain the difference between using the Pythagorean Theorem in finding the length of the hypotenuse or the leg, as well as identify and justify decisions as to when the Pythagorean Theorem can be used in a geometry problem. Evidence of a focus on academic vocabulary is evident in marine science, ELA, and Living Environment lesson plans.

- Curricula and academic tasks reflect planning so that diverse learners could have access. A grade-ten global lesson plan indicates that a transcript of the video that students are to watch will be available for students who require assistance in taking notes. In addition, sentence starters will be available as supports during group discussions. A grade-eleven ELA lesson plan identifies the students performing in the lowest third who will receive individualized teacher support. Additionally, students are purposefully grouped based on assessment data and needs as per their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in multiple lesson plans across content areas.

## Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Proficient |
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**Findings**

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the articulated belief that students learn best when they are required to justify and support their thinking with evidence. While student-work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation, this is not currently evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

**Impact**

Across content areas, students share and defend their work with peers, thereby producing meaningful products. Students participate in discussions that involve high-level thinking.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The articulated belief that students learn best when they are required to make their thinking visible was evident in a variety of classrooms. During a grade-nine social studies class, students discussed with a partner the different events that resulted in the 1960's nuclear crisis. During the subsequent whole-class share out, all arguments were defended with supporting evidence. English Language Learners (ELLs) in a mixed-grade class shared their findings as to how characters changed during the course of the novel *The Outsiders*. Within small groups, individual students analyzed individual characters and supported their findings by sharing direct quotes from the novel. Grade-ten students used textual evidence to support their arguments over whether Romeo or Juliet, from *Romeo and Juliet*, was a tragic hero. Similarly, during a geometry class, students answered four questions and presented their answer to one of the four questions within their small groups while supporting their answers with an explanation about the steps they took in order to arrive at their answers.

- During a mixed-grade ENL class containing students classified as emerging in their acquisition of English, students debated the similarities and differences between Atlanta and Guatemala. During a grade-ten Advanced Placement (AP) World History class, students engaged in a Socratic seminar during which they discussed the benefits and detriments of European powers' colonization of Africa. After engaging in a gallery walk during which grade-eleven students posted their reactions to seven statements that represented possible themes from *The Crucible*, students discussed their findings with group members.

- All students engaged each other in answering questions around the life functions of a horseshoe crab with partners during a marine science class. Within cooperative groups during a trigonometry class, students worked through two questions that tasked students with using rational functions in order to solve real-world problems. Students in an algebra class worked individually to answer questions regarding a scenario in which a wooden frame was to be constructed. This was followed by a discussion during which students shared the steps they took to detail the different steps that needed to take place in order to construct a wooden frame. Students challenged each other to defend their responses while also discussing how the answers would change if specific parameters within the equation would change. Additionally, students were observed conducting discussions with partners or within larger groups across additional math and science classes.

## Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**

School leaders support teachers' development with feedback and next steps through infrequent cycles of classroom observation. Feedback to teachers captures strengths, challenges, and next steps.

**Impact**

The feedback offered to teachers is not time-bound. Additionally, feedback in observation reports does not consistently provide actionable next-steps that teachers can use to improve their instructional practices.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The administrative cabinet created a calendar at the beginning of the school year that indicates the target dates by which all observation cycles should be completed. Review of the observation reports collected during the school visit evidence that there is an average two-month interval between school leaders' observation of each teacher's classroom. However, the absence of time-bound accountability attached to the feedback offered to teachers in observation reports either in the form of target dates for implementation or references back to previous feedback that was fulfilled in subsequent observation reports limits the effectiveness of that feedback.

- Classroom observation feedback is developing so that it can support teacher growth. For example, in one observation report, the teacher was praised for providing students who exceeded the lesson's objectives with an additional challenge question. This teacher was also advised to modify the formative assessment form used during instruction in order to increase its impact on student assessment. Other feedback advised teachers to use protocols so that student discussions could include all students, to have students pose questions to each other, and to utilize a system that would ensure that not only the students who volunteer participate, but also those who may be reluctant to engage. While there were examples of observation reports that accurately capture teachers' strengths and weaknesses, there were also observation reports that included minimal low-inference evidence from the observed classroom where wording taken directly from the rubric was used to support the rating itself, limiting the impact that feedback could have on teachers if they were to use classroom observation reports as tools for professional growth.

- There are observation reports that contain feedback lacking actionable next-steps or containing contradictory information. For example, one teacher was advised to have students reflect on the topic addressed during the lesson. In the report resulting from a classroom observation in which the teacher earned all well-developed ratings, the feedback asked the teacher, "Continue working with your students as well as you do. Continue helping them to stretch their thinking," without including any specific actionable steps that the teacher could implement in order to grow professionally. Additionally, in another observation report, the school leader indicated that one student was called on to answer "…almost every question." In this same report, the teacher was praised for creating genuine discussion among the students.

## Additional Finding

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

### Impact

Teachers' collaborations within content teams and working groups that focus on specific instructional strategies strengthen their instructional capacity. Teachers make decisions regarding the power standards that guide instruction across the school and choices of PD.

### Supporting Evidence

- The ELA teacher team met to analyze student essays from one team member's class about how algae could be a tool used toward solving the world's energy crisis. While teachers found that students were including evidence, a majority of essays detailed the general benefits of algae while not clearly discussing how algae could be used toward solving problems of energy consumption. Teachers then worked on developing a more student-friendly writing checklist that would guide them on how to write an evidence-based argument. Teachers also decided to include more models of student-written essays. Review of teacher team agendas and minutes evidenced that across teams, teachers are conducting inquiry based work. For example, ENL teachers have met to review student work to determine how instruction should be modified to help students increase their academic vocabulary. Additionally, through their inquiry-based work, math teachers have adjusted instructional practices to increase students' mastery of solving problems focused on exponential growth and decay.

- Teachers shared that they have been able to improve their individual instructional practices as a result of intervisitations that occur within the teacher team structure. For example, one teacher discussed using a graphic organizer to guide students' self-assessment after seeing this tool in use in a colleague's classroom. Similarly, other teachers discussed implementing multiple do now questions to address students' different learning needs and using a color coding system to more efficiently organize student's cooperative group roles.

- Teachers serve as leaders of teacher teams. All teachers on teacher teams have a voice in decisions regarding adjustments to curriculum and modifications to pacing calendars. The decision to issue a seal acknowledging students who are multi-lingual, upon graduation, was reached with teacher consensus and voice in determining the criteria that students who earn that distinction would need to meet. Additionally, teacher voice was included in the design of PD offerings for this school year as per their responses on a survey administered at the close of the 2016-2017 school year. Teachers also take a survey at the end of every PD cycle. These surveys evidenced teachers' desire for more content-specific PD. This led to a redesign of the second PD cycle for this school year to address teachers' concerns.