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School Quality Review Report School District of Philadelphia

Kensington Health Sciences Academy

November 2016

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1 The School Context

1.1 Introduction

In September 2016 Cambridge Education was awarded a contract against RFP-499 to provide School Quality Reviews (SQRs) to eleven School District of Philadelphia (SDP) schools. The scope of these Reviews is greater than a standard SQR, in that each SQR has a “Community Engagement and Feedback Focus”, which involves collecting input from as many school community stakeholders as possible. The SQR program includes the following:

- a School Quality Review (SQR) orientation for principals
- a two-day SQR for each school (5 elementary; 1 middle; 5 high)
- The equivalent of a third day, during which an SQR team member collects additional stakeholder feedback via small group meetings, one-on-one interviews; phone calls, etc.
- Three community “town hall style” focus groups
- A Community Stakeholder Survey
- A meta-analysis report of the school findings

The SQR report contained herein was prepared by the Lead Reviewer based on the evidence collected and the assessment made by the full SQR team (Lead Reviewer, Team Member Reviewer; Canvassing Lead). Evidence was collected via classroom observations; interviews with the administration; and focus groups with students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

1.2 Background information about the School

Kensington Health Sciences Academy (HSA) serves approximately 442 students in grades 9-12. The school provides specialized health services programs in nursing, dental hygiene, and pharmacy, and planning is underway to create additional programs. The student population is 56% Latino, 32% African-American, and 7% White. Approximately 28% of the students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and 18% are English Language Learners (ELL). The school's percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students is 100%. The overall achievement level of all students is far below standard, and an even wider achievement gap exists for special education students.

1.3 School demographic and performance data

Kensington HSA

	Academic Year (e.g. 2014-15) Previous Year	Academic Year (e.g. 2015-16) Most updated data before QR
Grades:	9-12	9-12
Number of students enrolled:	432	442
Percentage of general education students:	74%	71.4%
Percentage of special education students:	26%	28.6%
Percentage of English language learner students:		18.3%
In school suspensions:		
Out of school suspensions:	141	
Percentage of students that are Title 1 eligible:	100%	100%
Latest attendance percentage:	83.9	
Ethnic make-up of the students (percentages):	African American	32.1
	White	6.8
	Asian	1.4
	Latino	56.1
	Pacific Islander	0
	American Indian	0
	Other	3.6

State Test Results - Percentage of students at or above proficient

Subject Area	School 2012	School 2013	School 2014	School 2015	District 2015	State 2015
English Language Arts					42	60
Math					26	39.6
Science					20	67.8
Social Studies						
Others						
Algebra I		9	14	5	38	
Literature		22	24	17	49	
Biology		2	5	1	29	

*The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is an annual assessment administered in commonwealth classrooms in grades 3 through 8, and in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Science scores are usually from grade 4 and 8 for Elementary and Middle school.

Only grade 11 scores are included for High school (school, district, and state)

The Keystone Exams are one component of Pennsylvania's new system of high school graduation requirements. (data available for grade 11 in Algebra I, Literature, and Biology)

2 SQR Main Findings

In this section of the report, the SQR team has identified the factors that are most significantly supporting and limiting effective student learning.

2.1 Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The principal has developed a compelling vision for the school, centered around creating a learning environment in which students feel valued and experience success. This vision is shared by all key stakeholders and is enacted through the academic and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and external supports provided for students.
- ii. Faculty and administrators are passionate in their commitment to students, and interactions between and among the personnel and students are warm and mutually respectful. Great emphasis is placed on building students' "soft skills" (e.g., self-respect, courtesy, thoughtfulness, etc.) as a means of creating a culture of caring and respect throughout the building.
- iii. The principal and other school personnel have built strong networks of support around the health academies, which are a point of great pride in the school. This support includes partnerships with related businesses, universities, and community organizations. Supports provided by these entities include manpower, materials and equipment, volunteers, training for staff and funding, and other in-kind contributions.
- iv. Learning experiences are provided that connect students directly to the world of work and learning beyond high school. Strong emphasis is made on making learning experiences relevant, and the strong relationships that have been established between teachers and students further enhance students' perception of the relevance of their work in school. Supports for learning in high school and beyond through programs such as 12-Plus and City Year are providing much needed enhancements to student learning and helping students prepare for adult work life and higher education.

2.2 Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The school is beginning to implement instructional feedback systems such as instructional rounds, collaborative planning, and shared discussions around student challenges. Work in this area is starting to impact student performance, but these processes are not yet consistently implemented or as focused as they should be.
- ii. Many students enter the school significantly below grade level in their content knowledge and vocabulary, and teachers have not yet been consistently able to significantly reduce achievement gaps.
- iii. The school has been able to establish a strong nurturing culture; however, the school has not moved to the next steps in the transformation of the culture for learning to include greater focus around using data to inform instructional decisions, and sharing effective instructional strategies across grade levels and subject areas.

3 Individual Domains

In the sections below, each domain received a rating based on the evidence collected during the SQR. The judgments have been broken down into *Factors that Support Effective Student Learning* and *Factors that Limit Effective Student Learning*.

3.1 Domain 1: Quality of Learning & Teaching

The Quality of Learning & Teaching requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. Students in the health sciences academy routinely work together on assignments, and demonstrate strong collaboration skills. Observed lessons revealed classes in which students exhibited mastery of class routines and worked independently, questioning and coaching each other, with the teacher serving as the facilitator of learning.
- ii. Teachers invest time and resources into helping to ensure that students understand and master taught skills. Learning tasks are explained clearly and when students worked in small groups, teachers consistently monitored student discussions to clarify any misconceptions and ask questions to check for student understanding.
- iii. Strong relationships have been established between and among teachers and students, and the strength of those relationships is evidenced by student behavior that is generally respectful and compliant with teacher requests. With many students entering high school with significant skill deficits, these relationships are crucial to building trust and helping students overcome resistance to trying to do their best.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. While the content of lessons had strong relevance for students, the level of rigor in some classes was not sufficient to ensure that students would be able to think critically or engage in higher order problem solving. The lack of rigor also limits students' ability to master the cognitive level of state assessments.
- ii. While school personnel recognize that many of their students arrive in high school with significant deficits in their content knowledge, an effective system has not been established to provide instruction that both meets students' current functional levels and stretches them to the performance levels needed. Key to such a system would be improving the process of connecting student data with instructional decisions and helping students take ownership in their data and changing their learning behaviors to improve achievement.

3.2 Domain 2: Curriculum & Assessment

Curriculum & Assessment is established.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. Teachers demonstrate mastery of their content areas and plan lessons that align with state standards, and in the health sciences academies, the curriculum also aligns with accompanying industry standards. Class lessons had high levels of relevance and allowed students to connect their learning in the classroom to the real world of work.
- ii. The school has provided additional supports to help prepare students for opportunities in post-secondary education or the work world. Partnerships with organizations such as 12-Plus and City Year provide training in specific college preparatory skills and tutoring to enhance students' literacy and numeracy skills. These supports have the dual impact of not only skill building, but communicating the school's commitment to the students' success beyond high school.
- iii. The school provides a range of electives in fine arts and physical education to provide a broad range of learning experiences beyond the core academic classes. These courses allow students to explore and expand their skills and talents and, for some students, provide an added inducement to remain in school.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The school has not established an effective approach for significantly improving the performance of students who enter the school performing well below grade level. While the school has created a caring culture that makes all students feel welcomed and accepted, and has numerous academic support programs, the performance of these students continues to fall below tested standards.

3.3 Domain 3: Leadership, Management and Accountability

Leadership, Management and Accountability is established.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The principal has established a compelling vision for Kensington HSA focused on establishing a learner-centered culture that values students and nurtures their success both in and beyond high school. This vision is embraced by internal and external stakeholders and enacted through the programs provided by the school.
- ii. Policies and procedures have been established throughout the school to reinforce the expectation of appropriate student behavior at all times. Administrators and staff members greet arriving students and are stationed in hallways during transitions to ensure proper behavior. High expectations are expressed through the teaching of “soft skills,” (e.g., self-respect, thoughtfulness, etc.) that serve to build community and limit disruptive behavior.
- iii. The principal has distributed leadership throughout the school and teacher leaders have emerged on every grade level and across all content areas. These individuals are deeply committed to the success of individual students, and to the school as a whole, and work collectively to ensure the safe, orderly, and productive running of the school.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. Extraordinary efforts have gone into establishing a nurturing and positive school culture, but these efforts need to be better aligned into an overall strategic plan for improving the academic achievement of students. There are effective practices happening in classrooms throughout the school that should be embedded in every classroom, but there is no formalized structure for ensuring that this occurs.
- ii. Teachers are not provided sufficient feedback on how to increase their effectiveness in delivering instruction. Although teachers have collaborative planning sessions and have begun a process of conducting peer observations for shared learning around effective teaching practices, teachers need more specific, concrete feedback on improving the quality of instructional delivery.
- iii. Formative assessments are administered throughout the school year; however, in a number of classes, there was little evidence that the data generated from these assessments are being used to effectively differentiate instruction in order to address the learning needs of students and close gaps in achievement.

3.4 Domain 4: The Culture of Learning

The Culture of Learning is established.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. School leaders and the faculty have created systems and processes that resulted in a safe and respectful school environment. Students understand and value the expectations around acceptance and respect of others, working together peacefully and productively, and striving to do their best every day. Teachers and administrators have a passion for their work in the school, and consistently go above and beyond to help their students be successful.
- ii. Relationships between and among students and staff are positive, and both groups express attitudes of appreciation for the support that is provided and recognition of the challenges that remain, in terms of improving student achievement. The power of these relationships serves the purpose of both retaining students who live in the school's attendance zone, and also attracting students from outside of the zone who want to become a part of the school community through the health sciences academies.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. Despite the supports and nurturing culture that has been established in the school, there has not yet been an equally successful approach for ensuring that an adequate level of challenge is being provided to ensure that students can successfully perform on assessments of their knowledge and skill mastery of the core academic subjects. While there are examples where this is being done successfully in classes, these successful practices are not yet standard across the school.

3.5 Domain 5: Family and Community Engagement

Family and Community Engagement is exemplary

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The school has established routines and procedures for ensuring that parents are both kept informed of their children's progress and behavior in schools, but also supported in their efforts to build these skills at home. The school uses a variety of media including printed newsletters, emails, automated phone calling systems, and in-person conferencing to communicate with parents and bring them into the lives of their children at school.
- ii. Parents are encouraged to advocate for their children and work with the school to resolve issues both in school and at home. Teachers and other staff members devote the time necessary to help families learn about what their children are learning at school and how they are behaving, so that parents have the information necessary for them to better work with the school to create positive outcomes for their children.
- iii. The principal and other school personnel have built a strong, dedicated network of external partnerships to support the health sciences academies and the school as a whole. These partnerships include local two- and four-year higher education institutions, businesses, and community service organizations who provide both manpower and materials to support students during and after school. These partnerships provide much needed financial and in-kind support but also communicate to students that the larger community cares about their school.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. There is not an established structure for parents to have a formal role in decision-making at the school. Parents are kept very well informed and their voices are clearly heard through conferencing and outreach by the school, but parents are not actively a part of the school improvement process. The lack of formal parent voice in decision-making is a missed opportunity for building greater buy-in for the school's improvement objectives and for utilizing the parents as a resource for creating and supporting practices for improving student performance in school.

4 Community Engagement and Feedback Focus

This section of the report pertains to the wider Community Engagement and Feedback Focus component of the SQR process. These activities included two community focus groups, small group meetings, one-on-one interviews, as well as a community stakeholder survey. Community members and stakeholders provide valuable contributions to the improvement of schools, and they supplied a significant amount of meaningful feedback that enhanced the overall SQR process.

4.1 Areas of Strength for the School:

- i. Commitment to the school by parents who have opted to send their children to the school because the perceived and actual benefits of being a student there.
- ii. Strong partnerships with higher education institutions and other organizations in the city. They provide strong support for the health sciences academies, and provide materials and personnel, as well as valuable real-world experiences for students through internships.
- iii. The principal has transformed the culture of the school and created one that is student-centered and welcoming to all in the school community.
- iv. An orderly environment where students feel safe and where misbehavior is dealt with quickly and effectively, while maintaining relationships with students.
- v. Committed teachers who are seen as both competent and caring, and skilled at motivating students to be their best.
- vi. Great programs in the health sciences academies that prepare students for both higher education and careers after high school.

4.2 Areas of Improvement for the School:

- i. Parents and students would like to have more CTE programs offered at the school.
- ii. Parents, staff, and students are concerned that the school will be drastically changed. Based on past experiences in the district, they are leery of district motives.
- iii. People in the community and other areas of Philadelphia have negative misconceptions about the school.
- iv. Parents would like to have even more opportunities to engage with the school.
- v. Parents are not clear about the misalignment between state standardized test scores and the grades that their children receive on their report cards.

4.3 Stakeholders' views regarding school improvement:

Stakeholders made the following suggestions of how to improve the school:

- i. Continue to build and expand the successful health services academies, with a focus on student and community wellness.
- ii. Build stronger ties with the school district so that there will be higher levels of trust, and stakeholders will have confidence in knowing that the school is being supported.
- iii. Improve the community's perception of the school by launching a public relations campaign highlighting the school's programs and success.
- iv. Parents suggested monthly Saturday morning sessions for parents and the community to engage in activities such as workshops so they can better support their children.
- v. Parents suggest a clearer explanation from the school and/or district about standardized test scores and how they align with the report card.

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A. Community Stakeholders' Input

Families, community members/partners, staff and students shared their perspectives on a range of topics. The following are quotes collected during the School Quality Review and FACE Canvassing activities.

The following are typical of the comments made about the principal:

- *The school leaders are highly engaged with our organization because of a partnership spanning many years.*
- *The principal really knows how to work with partners and is always working to find more ways to get support for the school.*
- *The principal and staff are teaching us to be professional and productive.*

The following are typical comments made about the teachers:

- *Lack of substitutes to fill vacancies during short and long term absences impacts student achievement*
- *Teachers are happy.*
- *Teachers go above and beyond to make sure students learn. They take the time to explain things so we can understand and they don't just move on to the next topic.*
- *No excuse to fail here. There's so much help here.*
- *My teachers are strict so I can learn.*

The following are typical comments made about school culture:

- *We care about each other. There is not bullying at the school, and it's okay to be yourself. We support one another.*
- *There were fights everyday at my child's other school. He says he feels safe here and everyone gets along.*
- *School has fostered a safe environment where students feel valued.*
- *This school really cares about the students. My son has never worked so hard to make good grades.*
- *The school has built a relationship of trust among families which is necessary in understanding issues that prevent student learning.*
- *Everyone in the school is so dedicated to the students and will do whatever it takes to help them succeed.*
- *The staff knows everyone by name. They know who I belong to.*
- *We are like a family.*

The following are typical comments made about communication:

- *There is open, two-way communication between the school and community. Information is transparent and frequent.*
- *We have great communication with the teachers.*
- *I can see my child's grades on the Parent Portal.*
- *There's no communication for Spanish speaking parents.*

The following are typical comments made about engaging families and community members:

- *The organization has been involved in Back-to-School Night and other extra-curricular activities.*
- *We serve on the advisory committee for the school's Health Related Technology CTE program, thereby giving the organization a voice in decisions that impact the school.*
- *District level uncertainty as to the school's outcome does not lend itself to assuaging the school community's concerns regarding the stability of the school.*

B. Community Survey Data

There were no survey responses for Kensington Health Sciences Academy.

