

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Middle School for Academic and Social Excellence

Middle School 334

**1224 Park Place
Brooklyn
NY 11213**

Principal: Andrea Whitehurst

Dates of review: March 26 - 27, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Middle School for Academic and Social Excellence is a middle school with 219 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 87% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 88%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school staff has created protocols for a respectful and orderly environment that supports academic and social needs for students and adults. (1.4)
 - In response to concerns with school safety raised in last year's Learning Environment Survey (LES), the school has implemented strategies that build trust and respect among all constituents. The school has implemented a schoolwide uniform policy that has raised the level of consideration seen in student to student and student to teacher interactions. Further, school leaders maintain an "open door" policy to ensure that students, families and staff have a venue to address issues and concerns. The principal, who knows each child by name, meets once a month with the entire student body to discuss topics related to behavior protocols and academic expectations, providing extensive positive reinforcement for student behaviors that support community building and scholastic achievement. Teachers reach out to parents via phone calls and conversations to promote positive student behavior and academic progress. Additionally, the school's guidance personnel works with teachers, students and parents individually and in the classrooms to provide support for students' social and emotional growth. These efforts have resulted in students expressing that they are well cared for at school and parents describing the school as a "family". In addition, the school has recorded a significantly lower number of incidents and student suspensions over the last school year that has led to a safer environment.
- There is communication with staff and families to improve instruction and encourage good student attendance, in order to promote academic growth. (3.4)
 - School leaders are constructing individual professional development plans for teachers to support strong instructional practices. These include workshops that expose teachers to a research based rubric, which creates a common framework for classroom instruction. Teachers are now beginning to use this tool for self assessment and as a means of reflection on the impact of classroom practices. As a result, evidence of progress in literacy and math skills on Periodic Assessments has begun to be noted.
 - The school has hosted parent events to share curricular information and address student academic, behavioral and attendance expectations with families. These included "Curriculum Night" and school sponsored parent workshops. Parents also receive ongoing information regarding student work and next steps for learning via letters, phone calls and one-on-one conversations with teachers and staff. These interactions are strengthening the home-school connection and achievement of expected academic outcomes and the social and emotional development of all students. In addition, the school has recorded an increase in student attendance from 87.7% to over 92% so far this year.

- The school's partnerships and internal guidance collaborations support student learning and social growth. (4.4)
 - School based guidance personnel work with students to provide motivational incentives which help them to maintain focus on their academic and social development. They also meet with senior class students and families to facilitate the articulation process with the high schools and plan for college readiness. Consequently, students express that they feel sufficiently supported in their academic, social and emotional growth to prepare for their transition to high school and to plan for future careers.
 - The school collaborates with the 'Young Journey Program' that focuses on providing enrichment opportunities for students through their media program including instruction in photography, music production, video production, creative writing, magazine publishing and fashion. In addition, the school has afterschool programs that offer tutoring in literacy and math, dance, and sports. These experiences increase students' positive awareness of self and others and tap students' talents to develop appreciation of the arts to extend learning and academic growth.
- The school makes organizational decisions to support improvement initiatives, student learning and progress. (1.3)
 - In support of the goals to increase literacy and math skills school-wide, the school has purchased new computers to establish a computer lab that will soon be fully operational. The construction of a science lab is also in progress for the "grand opening" this spring. In addition, consultants were hired this year to support teachers in planning and instruction with a focus on literacy and math. Preliminary data and feedback from support staff indicate that these additional resources are yielding moderate improvements in teacher planning and student progress in these areas.
 - Time is allocated for teachers to meet twice weekly to collaborate at grade level and subject area inquiry teams. Some teams are beginning to focus on planning instructional tasks aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and others are working on developing instructional strategies to address student needs. As a result of these interactions, teachers are becoming more reflective as to the skills needed to improve instruction, and more students are starting to engage in higher levels learning.
- The school uses collaborative processes in the creation of school goals to improve instruction and student achievement. (3.1)
 - After review of student data on the English Language Arts (ELA) State assessment, the school has developed long term goals in literacy that reflect the Common Core Curriculum Standards. These goals are being incorporated into the school's curriculum maps. Consequently, teachers have begun aligning school-wide goals with classroom learning targets, and are now connecting student learning to expected outcomes.

- In response to concerns raised in the Learning Environment Survey as to collaborative engagement, the principal includes teacher leaders and cabinet members more frequently in scheduled meetings and teacher team meetings where the participants use school data, to help set goals and plan next steps for learning. As a result, consensus on expected outcomes and confidence among constituents in their capacity to influence student growth is developing.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop systems to measure progress toward student interim and long term goals in all subject areas in order to adjust and ensure student progress. (5.3)
 - While the school has created long term goals, a clearly defined process for the development of these goals where all stakeholders are involved and there are structures that derive goals from data driven needs, is not yet evident. Additionally, the school has not established systems for monitoring progress towards interim school, classroom and individual student goals. This impedes the school's ability to monitor on-going progress towards attaining end-of-year school, class and individual student goals and to inform mid-point adjustments when necessary, to ensure academic progress and achievement.
- Deepen the alignment of curriculum and instructional practices to ensure that all students receive rigorous instruction and achieve at high levels. (1.1)
 - The school has created curriculum maps that integrate Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in English language arts and math. However, the use of strategies for higher order thinking skills such as Webb's Depth of Knowledge or Bloom's Taxonomy was not evident in most classrooms. In these classrooms assignments were rudimentary and did not generate thoughtful discussion, analysis, or depth, as evidenced in student work products, limiting creativity and achievement for students.
 - Although there was evidence of curriculum planning, there is little evidence of planning learning tasks designed to engage student sub-groups across most classrooms. The absence of embedded practices reduces opportunities for challenging all students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners with rigorous instruction to promote engagement for a diverse student population.
- Ensure that teaching strategies offer differentiated learning activities that engage all students in challenging tasks to support their needs (1.2)
 - Even though the school shares a belief in differentiated instruction as a means to meet the needs of students performing at various levels, this practice was not evident in most classrooms. In some classrooms lessons included differentiated worksheet tasks based on students' readability levels however, there was little evidence of teachers using differentiated questions or teaching strategies to support individualized learning opportunities. This adversely affects understanding and skill development needed to maximize learning for all students, especially English language learners and special education students.

- There was evidence of student participation in all classrooms. However, high levels of engagement were not present in most assigned tasks. In some classrooms students were copying from the board and textbooks, while in others students were working on “Do Now” and worksheet assignments. The absence of high level questions and discussions significantly hampers students’ abilities to become partners in their own learning and to prepare for college readiness skills as evidenced in their work products.
- Refine the use of data and on-going student assessments to inform instructional decisions and provide a complete picture of academic progress for all students. (2.2)
 - Teachers analyze data from summative and Periodic Assessments to identify skills in need of improvement. However, the use of this information to plan instruction is inconsistent across classrooms as evidenced by several lessons which were not aligned to student needs and curriculum standards. This limits the ability for some teachers to plan effectively to address students’ academic weaknesses and teach curriculum mandates.
 - Although there is some evidence of lesson evaluation and learning reflected in teacher questioning and student assignments, this practice is not consistent throughout the school. Lessons do not universally include ongoing checks for understanding to properly determine the level of student comprehension of lesson content. This negatively impacts teachers’ abilities to make appropriate instructional adjustments to address the learning needs of all students.
- Extend the use of classroom observation protocols to provide consistency of focused feedback across all administrators that enhances instructional practices to support student progress and achievements. (4.1)
 - In addition to creating individual teacher development plans, school administrators visit classrooms and conduct observations connected to a research-based framework, providing teachers with feedback on instructional practices. However, the number of observations conducted varies among the leaders and feedback is sometimes generic. This diminishes opportunities for teachers to deepen instructional practices and hinders professional learning. Thus articulation of schoolwide pedagogic expectations to improve teaching and student outcomes is inconsistent and limited.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Middle School for Academic and Social Excellence	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		X		
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
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?		X		
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?		X		
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?		X		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?		X		
Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X		
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?		X		
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X		
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?		X		
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X		
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?		X		
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?	X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X		

Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed