

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**The School of Diplomacy**

**Middle School X370**

**3710 Bares Ave  
Bronx, NY  
10467**

**Principal: John Scalice**

**Dates of review: November 16-17, 2011**

**Lead Reviewer: Kyle S. Haver**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

The School of Diplomacy is a middle school with 448 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 65% Black, 30% Hispanic, 1% White, 3% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 87.2%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal aligns the budget, resources, space and schedule to meet the school's instructional goals to improve outcomes for all students. (1.3)
  - The principal and the leadership team have made important scheduling and budget decisions to ensure all teachers meet regularly on grade level and inquiry teams so they can focus on how the school goals are aligned to classroom curriculum and instruction. As a result, student work and assignments are better aligned to the school's goals.
  - School leadership has made it a priority to reallocate space and resources to ensure teachers have classroom materials that support the new instructional units teachers have created to align with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers are now introducing CCLS-aligned literacy and math tasks to all their students, as evidenced by classroom observations and studies of student work collections. As a result, all students are working on CCLS-aligned tasks and engaged in more cognitively demanding work.
- The school offers a positive, safe environment for all students and teachers that support an increased focus on student achievement and professional learning. (1.4)
  - By hiring a dean of students who coordinates very closely with the guidance staff closely and having students stay in their classrooms while teachers travel to the rooms, the principal and his leadership team have made some significant changes to ensure classrooms are safe and inviting for students. As a result, the school has decreased hallway conflicts by over 50% and increased instructional time so that teachers can better conference and engage students. Students report that the teachers spend more time with discussing their classwork and, in turn, they are more engaged in their own learning. One student stated, "There is always a teacher I can do to for extra help or turn to if they have a problem. This helps me want to do my best since they care so much."
  - The school's relentless focus on a positive school tone and academic achievement, which is evidence in the faculty handbook, school-wide expectations, and student behavior contracts, provides an important foundation and focus on teaching and learning. As a result, students report they have a clear idea of what is expected and how to access classroom materials. In addition, teachers report that the new handbook, the Danielson rubric and CCLS-aligned tasks with accompanying rubrics help them to focus on specific common standards and school-wide academic and social development goals.
- Through a system of constant dialogue and review of school-wide data, the leadership team has made careful and thoughtful adjustments to curriculum, resources, schedule and pedagogy, leading to improved student outcomes. (5.1)
  - The leadership team has studied and analyzed a wide range of school data that informed revisions in curriculum and the purchase of new classroom materials. In addition, the school has created and introduced common

instructional units and tasks to the faculty that are aligned to the CCLS in literacy and math. As a result, all literacy and math teachers have introduced at least one CCLS-aligned instructional unit and task so that every student can experience more cognitively engaging activities.

- The administration provided a wide collection of student data from Acuity, classroom grades, class-level assessments to teachers and made significant scheduling changes so that teacher teams could meet on grade level and subject-specific teams to better focus on meeting the instructional needs of all students. The creation of student portfolios and an on-line grading system enable staff, as well as families and caregivers, to see student work and course grades. This intentional collection and sharing of data related to student academic performance helps inform classroom practice and provides a continuous assessment of student performance and progress. In addition, both parents and students report that seeing course grades and homework assignments online help them know what is missing and what skills or content they need to improve in.
- The school has improved student supports by utilizing partnerships around guidance and social-emotional growth so that both students and teachers focus on learning as well as secondary and post-secondary readiness. (4.4)
  - Responding to concerns around school tone, safety and student social-emotional needs surfaced in the 2010-11 School Survey, the administration made important decisions to bring in community partners like Children Have a New Concept of Education & Success and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports that provide counseling and leadership training for students. Effective work with these partnerships has resulted in greater school spirit as evidenced by all students wearing school uniforms and a more than 50% decrease in student conflicts.
  - The leadership team, along with the guidance staff, has created a set of programs and materials such as an anti-bullying contract, student goal setting worksheets, and D-PLO (disciplined-prepared-loyal and organized) incentive program when students earn “dollars” when they show evidence of exemplifying and/or practicing these values. In addition, there are several other school-wide systems such as weekly meetings with mentors, professional development for faculty and guidance staff and monthly parent meetings to provide guidance and support for secondary and post-secondary readiness. As a result, students report they are well supported and families report that the school “really cares about each individual student and their success as young adults.”
- The leadership team has set up a system of frequent observations with common observation tools to inform professional conversations with teachers that improve classroom planning, questioning and pedagogy. (4.1)
  - Administration uses the Danielson framework to meet with individual teachers to co-construct Individual Professional Plans. Administrators also use common data tools such as a monthly instructional review template and a school-based skills integration survey to help inform the frequent, professional one-to-one conversations that focus on new strategies and teaching practices. Teachers report that these conversations are very helpful and they are beginning to integrate the practices discussed during these

meetings, resulting in more effective teaching and increased student engagement.

- The principal and assistant principals have created a common data-collection system based upon the Danielson framework that keeps track of their classroom visits and observations. The leadership team then transfers this information to a school-wide database and analyzes this data for trends, individual teacher's patterns and school-wide professional growth over time. This analysis will also inform teacher-to-teacher pairings and school-wide professional development. As a result, teachers report that this ongoing and specific feedback has helped them begin to integrate the new CCLS into their curricula.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Deepen curriculum development across all subject areas to ensure all students are asked to complete rigorous tasks that engage and challenge. (1.1)
  - The faculty meets on grade level and in cross-grade content teams to discuss instruction, student work, curriculum development and the new CCLS-aligned instructional unit and the resulting student work. However, the staff does not maintain a relentless focus on other standards-based instructional units or on curriculum maps that ensure all classroom activities include cognitively demanding tasks as well as well sequenced learning progressions that increase in rigor (including text and task complexity) over time. As a result, all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, are missing opportunities to practice higher order thinking skills.
  - The leadership team, professional development partners and the Network have created structures to introduce and implement a newly upgraded curriculum unit and tasks aligned to the CCLS. By sharing a model instructional unit and assessment tasks, the faculty has a better idea of what rigorous curriculum looks like. That said, the professional development has not yet provided information, tools and processes to help teachers to revise their current instructional units. As a result, there are missed opportunities to assist teachers in adjusting their curricula and pedagogy with accompanying questioning techniques more closely aligned to the CCLS.
- Strengthen pedagogical practices so that students engage in academic tasks that challenge their thinking and push students to capture their learning through various forums in order to produce high quality work. (1.2)
  - The school believes that students' active engagement with a task is essential for learning. While students were engaged to complete an assignment, they were not provided opportunities to challenge their peers and question assumptions in order to make deeper connections with the material. The faculty utilizes Bloom's taxonomy to guide their questioning strategies, however the majority of questions linger at a low level, resulting in simple student responses with minimal explanation of thinking. A few teachers attempted grouping students for learning but many lessons were teacher directed and asking students to complete graphic organizers or checklists. Consequently, opportunities were missed for students to participate in peer discussions and small group learning that would foster deeper understanding of the content. In the absence of stronger instructional strategies that target

students needs, foster independent thinking and teach students skills and strategies necessary to master standards, students struggle to produce quality work in preparation for higher educational experiences.

- Extend teacher teams to use a collaborative inquiry process so that student work and data are consistently used to modify and adjust instruction, curriculum, and assessment, resulting in improved teacher practice. (4.2)
  - Grade-level teacher teams meet regularly to look at student work and meet at other times in cross-grade content teams. During these meetings teachers often discuss student data and/or use low inference observations on a small sample of student work. In the absence of a wide repertoire of protocols to study and analyze student and teacher work, there are missed opportunities to reveal strengths and needs that could inform decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment and intervention strategies.
- Strengthen the use of rigorous common assessments that align to meaningful rubrics so that all students have clear and understandable expectations and increase student learning. (2.2)
  - Teachers and teacher teams are beginning to use common assessments and rubrics across classrooms. Although teachers use these common materials, there is an inconsistency in their classroom pedagogy and in how the tasks and rubrics are being used. As a result, student work is inconsistently assessed. There is limited time spent on moderation work, inter-rater reliability and clear exemplars on providing effective, descriptive and timely feedback to students so it is difficult for students to know what is expected and what they need to improve in order to accelerate their learning.
- Strength the school community's support of the school's vision through continuous conversations on student progress in order to make necessary adjustments towards goal attainment. (3.1)
  - The principal and his leadership team, with Network support, collected and studied a set of data tools to help inform the school's short and long term goals. However, teachers and teacher teams have a limited understanding of these goals and do not always refer back to these valuable resources when meeting with parents or teacher teams. As a result, there are missed opportunities to stay focused on these essential goals so that everyone within the community, including students, can share the same vision and goals for secondary and post-secondary readiness.
  - The principal has a long-term plan for school goals as noted in the Comprehensive Education Plan. These goals have helped the leadership team envision the work that is needed to meet this ambitious trajectory. However, the school has not yet developed any structures or timeframes to review the growth towards the goals throughout the year. As a result, there are limited opportunities for administration and the teacher teams to use student data to monitor and adjust instruction and professional development to ensure all students are working towards the school's goals.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: The School of Diplomacy</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		<b>X</b>		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		<b>X</b>		
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?		<b>X</b>		
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
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?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?		<b>X</b>		
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?		<b>X</b>		
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?		<b>X</b>		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		<b>X</b>		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		<b>X</b>		

<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</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>X</b>					
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?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?		<b>X</b>					
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?		<b>X</b>					
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		<b>X</b>					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>