

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Meyer Levin School for the Performing Arts

Middle School 285

**5909 Beverley Road
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Frederick Underwood

Dates of review: December 12 - 13, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Meyer Levin School for the Performing Arts is a middle school with 954 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 95% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 92.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Shared commitment and collaborative work create a culture of action planning, reflection, and improvement that advance student learning. (3.1)
 - School leadership meetings, parent association gatherings, and teacher team inquiry serve as venues to assess movement in attaining instructional and school improvement goals as stipulated in the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP), Principal's Performance Review document, and posted in community areas within the school. As such, review of interim checkpoints and in-depth discussions address emerging trends that drive shifts in priorities such as the need for stronger emphasis on student citing textual evidence and deepening teaching strategies to enhance vocabulary development across grades. Similarly, social and emotional challenges that interfere with learning result in action planning that promotes student government, advisories, and targeted mental health supports. In turn, a culture that values inclusive conversation among students, teachers, and parents, promotes reflection, evaluates the merit of action plans, and adjusts critical school-level goals resulting in improvements that facilitate accelerated learning as evident in improved levels of proficiency on sixth grade unit assessments when compared to diagnostics results in English language arts and math.
 - The school leverages the work of the parent coordinator and community associate as a way to keep parents informed and involved in the success of the school. Hence, coordination of monthly parent meetings, consultation with the parent executive board, school leadership team input, and an active student government, leads to all voices sharing in decision-making processes and a mutual support for school improvement plans. The Title 1 parent committee supports the goal of 5% to 7% increases in the number of students who achieve one year of progress in English language arts and math by providing funds to support a Saturday Academy designed to provide educational activities and workshops for students and their parents. Therefore, effectively communicated school-level goals engender support from all stakeholders positioning the school for annual improved outcomes.
- The school implements a standards-based curriculum across grades and content areas, with attention to Common Core Learning Standards' (CCLS) shifts, which lead to increased student achievement. (1.1)
 - The school develops curricula aligned to State standards incorporating Citywide Instructional Expectations across grades thus promoting college and career readiness for all learners via rigorous performance tasks and interdisciplinary units of study. At a minimum, the development of two CCLS aligned units of study in all core subjects allows students across the learning spectrum opportunities to engage in learning experiences aimed at high school preparedness. Additionally, the integration of CCLS instructional shifts is evident in curriculum maps and unit plans in English language arts and math, setting the course for closing persistent

achievement gaps by deepening students' understanding of content through authentic learning experiences. Teacher created lessons emphasize key standards such as performance-based writing tasks, reading of high-level informational texts, and focused engagements in major math clusters that foster fluency and conceptual knowledge of ratios and proportional relationships and of expressions and equations. In addition, a Project Arts approved and validated dance curriculum, written by a teacher, serves to enrich the school's performing arts program.

- Refinement of curriculum leads to skill-based activities for students performing in the bottom third percentile school or Citywide. Groups of teachers plan tutorial sessions focused on identified requisite skills aligned with specific bodies of knowledge such as operations with fractions and decimals, and organization in writing and conventions of print, ensuring deficiencies are addressed via properly scaffolded tasks. Thus, improved performance averages, among subgroups in the lowest third, is evident by increases in levels of proficiency on benchmark tests when compared to former diagnostic results and confirmed in rubric-based assessments in writing.
- Common assessment practices consistently provide comprehensive data on student performance and progress and lead to adjustments of pedagogy. (2.2)
 - Teachers utilize common assessments, performance-based tasks, Acuity Performance Series baseline and benchmark assessments, and create content and grade level tests and rubrics to uniformly measure student learning and ensure coherence of curriculum across all classrooms. The school's grading policy yields a clear picture of student mastery of topics and skills as well as areas in need of further support. Consequently, teachers provide students with written feedback on their work products, which include argumentative writing and math models, that is closely aligned to intended goals and learning benchmarks. Thus, students are empowered to improve upon their work and teachers use student work to adjust lessons. Because re-teaching occurs based on student outcomes, student performance is re-assessed, leading to improvement in students' work. This deliberate work of analyzing both the common assessment results and student work provoke targeting different ways in which written questions are posed, and helping students to deconstruct language in wording and word problems. As a result, there has been a significant gain toward mastery in seventh grade performance involving multi-step order of operations word problems.
- Teacher teams engage in collaborative professional opportunities that support them in developing effective instructional approaches, build capacity, and results in better outcomes for groups of students. (4.2)
 - The majority of teachers hone instructional practices informed by inquiry work. Teachers on an interdisciplinary team, and as key curriculum decision makers, analyze and evaluate student work products by focusing on strengths and deficits presented in work samples. As such, looking at student work through the lens of Common Core Learning Standards provokes changes to pedagogical approaches and in the delivery of

instruction, which encompass all grades, subjects, and mandated services. An interdisciplinary team of teachers examines a student's writing using a protocol that produces a list of teaching strategies for adjustments to their practice when confronted with similar written work in their respective subjects. As described by one teacher "This work places colleagues on a faster trajectory", thus supporting the building of professional capacity.

- Grade-level and content based teacher facilitated common planning and collegial sharing allow teachers to work together using varied strategies and resources to support student learning via review of student assessment data to identify students' strengths and areas of challenge. In turn, this collaborative work has led to identification of pedagogical practices that best support students by increasing their rate of progress. Review of work on fractions and decimals for grade 6 students surfaced a need to strengthen multiplication skills, encourage use of academic vocabulary, and have students provide an oral and written rationale for their answer. Examining student work and reviewing the progress of students in the school's bottom third resulted in teachers researching ways to improve efficacy and effectiveness of their instruction, leading to progress for relevant sub-groups of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teacher questioning techniques and use of individualized scaffolds to provide all learners with opportunities to participate in the learning process in order to accelerate scholastic growth. (1.2)
 - This year the school is focusing on classroom environment and the development of teacher questioning and discussion techniques in order to engage students, provide multiple entry points, challenging tasks, and appropriate extensions to lessons. As such, in some classrooms, students complete tiered activities and work cooperatively in ability and interest groups and teachers in these classrooms scaffold engagements to instigate inquiry and discovery as observed in an eighth grade math class exploring scatter plots and in a sixth grade science class investigating states of matter. However, the vast majority of lessons observed and lesson plans reviewed did not reflect appropriate, intentional teacher inquiry that incites rich student discussions. In English language arts classes, teachers' questioning did not push student thinking or lead to elaboration of opinions and arguments. In a social studies and a math class, teacher-to-student responses led to low-level engagements that failed to stimulate rich discussions or dispel misconceptions. As such, inconsistencies in teaching strategies and questioning across classrooms and grades give students unequal access to curriculum and challenging tasks, hindering opportunities to further accelerate learning potential for all students.
- Extend the sharing of student performance and progress data with families ensuring greater understanding of next steps toward meeting academic expectations. (3.4)
 - The 2011 -2012 Learning Environment Survey indicates the school is slightly below the citywide average for all middle schools in academic

expectations scores. However, teachers and parents interviewed feel the school leader holds students, teachers, and parents to high-level performance standards and recognizes that students are being prepared for and accepted into specialized high schools and post-secondary institutions. Nevertheless, parents also expressed inconsistency in teacher communication about their children's academic progress. Parents reported all teachers do not utilize Pupil Path, an online system for reporting and monitoring attendance data, test scores, homework assignments, and work habits or the available information is not up-to-date. Therefore, parents do not receive timely progress feedback. In addition, as not all parents have convenient access to a computer, communication between home and school is thwarted. Although the school provides a progress report, parents report there is a lack of recommendations and suggestions thereby hindering their ability to help at home. Consequently, parents lack a clear understanding of next steps for providing full support to further improve the performance of their children.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Middle School for the Performing Arts	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
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?			X				
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
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?				X			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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				
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?			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed