

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Middle School 381

22K381

**1599 East 22nd Street
Brooklyn
NY 11210**

Principal: Mary A. Harrington

Dates of review: January 28-29, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Rhonda Dawn Farkas

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

I.S. 381 is an Intermediate School with 370 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 61% Black, 21% Hispanic, 9% White, and 9% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-2012 was 95.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders ensure the coherence of curricula across grades and subjects to accentuate key standards and Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) tasks to emphasize rigor and high order skills to cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
 - Curricula and academic tasks, across disciplines and grades, consistently emphasize rigor and high order skills for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and Students with Disabilities (SWDs), and require students to demonstrate their learning and produce meaningful work products. Rooted in curricula across grades and classrooms are well planned units of study that require students to engage in tasks in which they must consider multiple meanings, interpretations, support positions, and engage in critical thought. Additionally, integrated throughout the culture of the school are instructional approaches that embed rigorous habits such as questioning and problem posing, taking responsible risks, thinking interdependently, and remaining open to continuous learning. In one 8th grade English language arts (ELA) class, for example, the teacher focused on the standards centered around key ideas and details, craft and structure, and writing. In this particular class, students were positioned as editors of a newspaper and evaluated pieces of literary texts to determine what was important and what was subsidiary to the text. One group worked cooperatively to reach consensus about what could be improved or deleted in a response from an ethicist. A student in the group stated, “This class is very impressive; it’s a very debatable class and the teacher always asks for our opinions that we have to support with text evidence.” In a sixth grade ELA class, the teachers required the students to peer edit rough drafts of persuasive essays in response to two essential questions: “How do people’s choices shape who they become?” and “What is the effect of making choices?” Students’ verbal and written responses to these types of questions are used by teachers to determine levels of cognitive engagement, minimize barriers to instruction, and vary instructional methods to provide multiple points of access for all students. As a result, across classrooms, students are engaged in rigorous thinking and/or use higher order skills to produce meaningful work.
- Teacher pedagogy is aligned to curricula and results in high levels of student engagement and meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms and disciplines, teaching practices leverage strategies such as critical thinking, inquiry, collaboration, and scaffolding that reflect challenging lessons and provide multiple access points to engage all learners. Student work products and thoughtful discourse reflect the use of high level academic language in evidence-based accountable talk in lessons. Furthermore, all students, including ELLs and SWDs, are encouraged to formulate questions, express accord or discord with peers, argue, use text-based evidence to support their stance, and offer unsolicited contributions. In a Social Studies class, for example, students analyzed the impact of public opinion and government policies by working on World War I era civil liberties cases after expressing and defending their opinions of a quote by Noam Chomsky on the freedom of expression. As a result, students were able to

arrive at new understanding of complex material and demonstrate mastery of learning objectives. Thus, all students, including relevant subgroups identified by teachers, such as English language learners and students with disabilities, are cognitively engaged in student-led discussions that are grounded in text evidence in response to thought provoking, open-ended essential questions such as “How did the use of particular technology influence the behaviors of society?” Taking a more strategic approach to their work, students work cooperatively with their peers, and demonstrate high level thinking, as evidenced by their aptitude in presenting arguments in response to queries posed by teachers, their use of grade appropriate academic vocabulary, and supporting their stances with evidence. Moreover, students are able to articulate success criteria and aptly apply the organized norms found in the rubrics to produce quality work. These teaching practices have resulted in demonstrations of extensions of student thinking about required course content and increased student performance, as evidenced by an increase of 3.1% in English language arts on the school’s most recent Progress Report.

- The Principal makes intentional organizational decisions that support the school’s instructional goals and strengthen instructional practice in order to engage students in challenging academic tasks. (1.3)

- The Principal intentionally schedules daily common planning time, which results in grade-level, vertical, and cross-graded team structures for meeting. As a result, teachers have ample opportunities to collaboratively unpack text exemplars, critically examine the learning expectations from selected CCLS, examine student work products and develop a common understanding of the concepts and skills needed to meet the expectations set forth in the standards. These team meetings follow clear agendas and protocols and have resulted in increased coherence to teachers taking proactive paths of moving students toward independence and achieving success. Thus, there is increased collaboration, collective responsibility, a shared purpose for student learning, and consistency of student work expectations. Additionally, the Principal frequently analyzes the fiscal capital available to the school community and makes strategic decisions to fund targeted efforts that consider the needs of all students. For example, the use of Title I funds reduced class size, bringing the average class size to 28 as opposed to the contractual 33. Two New York State certified teachers of Language Arts and Mathematics were hired to provide targeted instruction and academic intervention in small groups for Level 1 and 2 students in ELA and math. Identified areas of deficiency for cohorts of students are identified and addressed in smaller group formats. As a result, teachers provide tailored interventions to support student learning of core instruction and ensure comprehensible access to the curricula so that students achieve grade level content expectations that lead to improved achievement outcomes, as evidenced by demonstrated improvements to student work products and increased mastery of concepts and performances within grade bands on performance task rubrics.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that teacher observations are consistent across leaders, provide quality feedback, and focus on improving instructional practices in order to improve pedagogy and student outcomes. (4.1)

- The Assistant Principals observe teachers using a research-based framework and feedback identifies strengths, challenges, and next steps that are beginning to support teacher development. However, the Principal is not formally part of this process. This impedes her ability to build capacity of her leadership cabinet, norm findings, track positive trajectories toward teacher effectiveness, and ensure actionable, high quality feedback to teachers. Consequently, clear expectations for teachers to advance their practice are uneven across supervisors. As a result, school leaders' capacity to ensure consistency of a systemic structure to monitor and support teacher efficacy across classrooms and connect pedagogy to student learning gains is thwarted. Furthermore, the impact on teachers and students is unclear and coherence and ownership of the school's direction for adult and student learning is diminished. This prevents school leaders from using teacher observation data to effectively design and facilitate professional development focused on promoting professional growth and helping teachers become reflective practitioners.
- Strengthen the use of ongoing assessments to curricula and analysis of student learning outcomes to align with key standards to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level and improve student learning. (2.2)
 - The school participates in *School of One*, a program that streamlines data in mathematics for teachers to benchmark performance and guide their advisory sessions. However, this practice is not consistent across subject areas, thereby limiting the potential for teachers across the school to ensure that grade wide goals are accomplished and tracked for progress. Although teacher teams create performance tasks and measure student progress towards goals across grades and subject areas using rubrics, the rubrics are not task specific across grades and subject areas, resulting in general feedback to students. Thus, students' ability to conceptualize their learning targets and monitor their own progress is restricted. Additionally, in some classrooms, teacher practice reflects ongoing checks for understanding in the form of roving check-ins and whole class shares to gauge student progress toward lesson goals during teaching. However, the use of well-crafted questions, formalized conferring approaches, and student self-assessment opportunities is inconsistent across classrooms. Consequently, there are uneven opportunities for teachers to determine interim progress toward the attainment of grade level goals, make effective and timely adjustments to ensure student understanding, or customize lessons to meet diverse students' learning needs, hindering higher levels of student performance.
- Establish specific school goals and action plans, including professional development planning that are tracked for progress and understood and supported by the entire school community to yield substantial improvement in student progress. (3.1)
 - There are general school, grade-wide, teacher, and student goals that include the development of performance tasks that are aligned to the CCLS, with a focus on the instructional shifts. These goals include improving students' fluency and conceptual understanding in mathematics and building students' argumentation skills and enabling them to marshal evidence to defend their positions in literacy. However, the vision of school improvement to ensure that data-based school goals are accomplished, tracked for progress, linked to trends, successes, and targeted areas for improvement is not collectively understood by the entire school community. Parents, whose language is other than English, as well as those without home computers, do not have access to pertinent information

disseminated by the school. As a result, the relevancy of data and a shared urgency among the school's constituents related to the school's direction for improving student progress for all students, as measured by growth percentiles on the school's two most recent Progress Reports, is hampered.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Middle School 381	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