

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Lyons Community School

Secondary School 14K586

**BROOKLYN
NY, 11206**

Principal: Taeko Onishi

Dates of review: May 31, June 3, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Lyons Community School is a secondary school with 532 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 42% Black, 55% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 14.6% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 81.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- All students benefit from cognitively engaging curricula that is refined and integrates the instructional shifts and prepares them with college and career readiness skills. (1.1)
 - Across the school, teachers have developed curriculum maps and units that reference the Common Core Learning Standards or the existing State standards as appropriate. Most teachers use a backwards design model, anticipating formative and summative assessments, learning activities, and options for differentiation to meet the needs of diverse learners. There is a schoolwide focus on literacy with the use of evidence to back assertions, and an emerging insight that content can be taught through argument. Middle school science and living environment units have been crafted with support from the New Visions Literacy Design Collaborative to align with the school's focus standards, and involve hands-on inquiries that provoke thinking and theory building. New courses in chemistry and Algebra 2 have increased college readiness in the upper grades, while a partnership with Math for America has enhanced rigor, ensuring a strong emphasis on problem solving and multiple representations. Students explore complex questions such as "How does the relationship between different parts of the psyche create or resolve 'at risk' behavior?", "Should citizens receive a guaranteed basic income? and "What is the relationship between human nature and slavery?" They also engage in original research in the school's hallmark field studies, such as year-long off-site investigations, and social action projects. As a result, all students have regular opportunities to participate in meaningful curricula with tasks to build knowledge and become college and career ready.
 - The school has an established process for reviewing curricula and academic tasks, with weekly departmental meetings dedicated to curriculum design, and quarterly school-wide reflections on student and teacher work. These evaluations inform modifications of completed units and the development of supports for upcoming units. Such supports include scaffolds such as graphic organizers and sentence frames to enhance content-area literacy, especially for English language learners and students with disabilities. In addition, these reviews help refine the selection of multiple texts and audio-visual supports and allow for quick integration of learning activities that are informed by teacher participation in professional development to increase the level of cognitive engagement.
- The principal aligns programs and resources, with an emphasis on student and adult learning, to support the attainment of school goals. (1.3)
 - The Urban Workshop is among the vast array of external partners the school enlists to reinforce its vision of meeting student needs through real life experiences. The high needs group of mostly overage students who participated in this program's off-site construction of community projects and on-site building of furniture, increased both their attendance and credit accumulation. The school also targets "at risk" students, such as the 16 students who lacked sufficient credit to be promoted to tenth grade, with additional supports, in the form of support group counseling

with the school's co-director and a focused academic skills building advisory, such that nearly half of them increased their credits this year. Active pursuit of partnerships is increasing staff instructional capacity, as two teachers and the building leader participate in Math for America, and several teachers serve as mentors in the Hunter College Urban Teacher Residency program, which strengthens their instructional strategies to support all students. This results in greater teacher ability to lead students in creating meaningful work products, such as museum guides that tell the story of comparative religion through artifacts or model green roofs that integrate knowledge of architecture and the environment.

- Effective teams and teacher partnerships promote shared accountability for student progress. For example, to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, all of whom enter integrated co-teaching classes from Grade 8 onwards; co-teachers specialize either in math and science, or in the humanities for improved content support. In addition, an English as a second language teacher has joined the staff to provide both “push in” and “pull out” support for this subgroup. All of these teachers meet regularly with the content area teachers to coordinate alignment of tasks to the school’s instructional goals. Meanwhile, eight teachers have been trained in the Supporting Adolescent Literacy (SAL) program and provide intervention for students, with particularly low reading skills. These students on average gained over 1.5 years in reading levels as measured by the WRAP reading assessment. The Algebra teacher, whose students’ weighted Regents pass rates were the highest in the City last year, has started the school’s first Algebra 2 course. While the school’s success with the lowest performing students is reflected in the five points earned as additional credit on the high school Progress Report last year, these new initiatives deepen and expand on effective practices to further improve college and career readiness.
- The school’s culture is collaborative, supportive and caring of students’ social-emotional needs, resulting in an environment that is safe and conducive to high levels of academic learning. (1.4)
 - The school’s co-directors desks are located in the faculty room which operates as the hub of the school and facilitates constant communication. Parents appreciate the visibility and accessibility of school leaders in an environment they describe as “uplifting” and appreciate the individualized attention leaders and teachers provide. Students express that, “half of what the school does come from us.” A teacher on each grade serves as a designated liaison to the management team that discusses and implements schoolwide policies, and has led to a unification of policies within the middle school and the high school divisions. Initiatives to improve management include a Grade 9 real-time electronic cut-tracker and an electronic system for recording interventions for the dean’s review and action the following morning. The school actively enlists students in building a school culture that values accountability to the community, with ongoing acknowledgment of positive behaviors to promote uniform expectations for academic and social behaviors across classrooms. For example, students reinforce expectations through the multi-grade “Justice Panel”, which, guided by the dean, hears cases on infractions of school rules, administers consequences, and posts the findings. As a result of the improved climate and systems, there has been a reduction in dean referrals, and suspensions have declined from 0.43 per student in 2009

to 0.11 in 2011 to 0.04 per student in the year to date, with nearly half of all incidents attributed to only five students.

- School leaders and teachers are fully invested in knowing each student as deeply as possible so they can tailor supports accordingly. One parent credited the school for detecting a long undiagnosed learning disability and appropriately supporting her daughter so that she is now an honor roll student. The key point of entry is through the advisory structure, as students meet several times a week to explore social-emotional issues, using defined protocols such as “circles” and “fist of five”, and to conduct homework checks and receive tutoring. This year, a special attendance team targeted a group of approximately 70 students who had attendance rates of between 80-90 percent with personalized attention, including problem solving conferences, goal-setting and daily check-ins. By midyear, tracking data revealed that this group’s attendance had surpassed the school average, which is nearly 3 points higher than last year. Students credit the teachers' deep concern for their welfare for helping them be successful: “They really care about you. They’ll find ways to help us be our best.”
- All teachers are involved in inquiry based professional collaborations which result in effective teacher leadership and stronger pedagogical reflection that enhance student learning. (4.2)
 - All teachers collaborate in teams to improve practice, meeting weekly as departments to revise curricula based on student outcomes, the demands of the standards, and on the grade level to build pedagogical practice through inquiry work. Grade level teams regularly review student work across subject areas for their target population—often black males in the city’s lowest third—to address specific learning issues as well as teacher work to discern where tasks and supports may have failed to provide sufficient clarity. Teams are goal oriented, focused on identifying a high leverage skill, co-designing one or more lessons to teach the skill, and then examining student work to evaluate the effectiveness of the efforts. Successful strategies emerging from team work with the use of AIR (assertion, illustration, restatement) paragraphs and sentence frames that extend thinking through the use of conjunctions, such as *because*, *but*, and *so*, migrate across the grades for schoolwide adoption. As a result, pedagogical repertoires have expanded to improve teacher practice across the school, leading to increased student progress, as measured by teacher-made assessments and published State data measurements.
 - Over two thirds of teachers are involved in leadership roles, which include two teachers on each grade who facilitate inquiry or represent the grade on the schoolwide management team. Teachers credit inquiry work for helping them “find what to push on.” As one teacher stated, “the school trusts the inquiry process as the way to align team work and focus across the school.” School leaders attend team meetings, often scripting the sessions to reflect together, coach the team leader in facilitation skills, and chart out next steps to obtain maximum value from meeting time. This process has enabled all teams to work effectively in support of the school’s priorities to increase student progress in meeting post secondary skills.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on pedagogical strategies to support teaching practices that insure consistency in active student participation in class discussions and raise all students' cognitive skills. (1.2)
 - The school's belief that students learn best through inquiry is realized primarily through the field studies and in social action research projects. In these contexts, where students access information in multiple ways, work collaboratively, create models and websites, conduct performances and present their work to authentic audiences, the quality of work closely matches the school's aspirations. However, this belief is not consistently reflected in all core academic subjects, where there is some variation in the quality of instruction and opportunities for students to engage deeply with content. In some classes, students have protocols for discussing carefully crafted text-based questions that required close reading and analysis and for solving non-routine problems in math, which results in the demonstration of high levels of thinking. In others, discussions are entirely teacher-led and of low level. Many teachers use read alouds to provide access to texts but fail to use these occasions to explore key passages in greater depth. Consequently, discussions remain superficial and impressionistic. Nearly all teachers use different types of scaffolding, such as guiding questions and graphic organizers to lead students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, towards production of standards-level work. However, some do not attempt to meet particular needs, relying instead on additional support periods to help English language learners access the curricula. These inconsistencies in classroom practices hamper school wide efforts to meet the ongoing needs of all learners.
- Develop consistent school wide assessment practices, with ongoing checks for student comprehension, to enable teachers to inform instructional strategies supporting improved student outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school uses multiple assessments and an electronic, color-coded tracking system, which allows teachers and leaders to monitor students' academic behaviors and performance. While some departments have excellent systems for tracking mastery of content and provide additional resources and assessments so that students can work very deliberately on their areas of need, this promising practice has not yet extended throughout the school. Teachers across the school use rubrics to score and provide feedback on student projects and written work. However, there is no consistency within and across departments in how these rubrics are constructed, and they do not consistently align to the standards. This limits the school's ability to provide precise, high-leverage feedback to students so that they can set more meaningful goals. In addition, the lack of consistency impairs the school's ability to monitor progress toward key standards, so that the faculty can discern the impact of particular teaching practices and curricular approaches, in order to guide adjustments to increase student achievement.
 - Teachers across the school obtain formative data through questioning, homework checks, exit tickets, and ongoing review of student work. In most cases, these data inform lesson planning, instructional adjustments and decisions about grouping students. However, the use of ongoing checks for understanding during lessons is less consistent. While some teachers have exemplary routines for recording formative data, such as that seen in an 11th grade English class where the teacher circulated amongst discussion groups recording individual behaviors in five desired traits, other teachers lack classroom practices to evaluate students'

understanding of content or skills during lessons. As a result, lessons are not always immediately adjusted in ways that meet the needs of all students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Lyons Community School	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