

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Middle School for Art and Philosophy

K588

**1084 Lenox Road
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Neil McNeill

**Dates of review: April 4 -5, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Middle School for Art and Philosophy is a middle school with 364 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 90% Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Administrators support teachers through varied formative cycles of observations, thus teachers receive feedback that promotes professional growth and personal development. (4.1)
 - School leaders provide all teachers with concrete feedback and actionable recommendations explicitly linked to agreed upon mutual next steps to improve their practice and student performance. Feedback and tracking systems ensure cycles of professional support are firmly in place. Therefore, formative and formal observations, teacher requested walk-in visits, learning walks, self-assessments, mid-year reviews, one-to-one goal setting meetings, use of a school-created reflection document, collegial inter-visitations, and off site trainings promotes next steps in teacher development. Through broad ranging opportunities for all teachers, both new and experienced, administrators adjust verbal and written feedback to guarantee links to instructional, school-wide, and personal goals. Thus, there is improvement in instructional practices that directly impact student engagement and surface students' needs as evident in observation reports and teacher inter-visitation reflection documents.
 - Teachers set SMART goals aligned to the Danielson framework, a research-based rubric, specifically Domains 1 and 3 which guide school leaders' specific feedback on demonstrated levels of pedagogic and instructional competency in Domains 1 and 3. Administrators spotlight what both the teacher and students are doing with careful attention to low inference notation. In addition, the use of Boyle's Dimension of Learning Matrix supports the administrative team in identifying target next steps to facilitate differentiated professional learning. Teachers report the use of behavior and practice indicators is useful information that results in clear understandings of their professional growth and the areas for further development.
- Teacher teams engage in collaborative inquiry to examine student work and share their expertise, which promotes reflective instructional practices and improves student outcomes. (4.2)
 - Professional collaborations are a priority that steer the school's improvement efforts. As such, teacher teams engage in cycles of inquiry based on student work outcomes and the school's analysis of the New York State English Language Arts examination. Ambassadors of the ELA department turnkey external professional training to embed instructional best practices aligned in creating performance tasks with varying levels of complexity. Interdisciplinary teams meet to construct graphic organizers, discuss instructional strategies, examine writing samples, and scrutinize evidence of improved outcomes. This strong culture of professional learning and collegial collaboration promotes collective accountability as evidenced by cycles of inquiry that build on key school standards across disciplines. Reflective work by teacher teams results in school-wide action planning that move students to mastery of organizational writing

skills. The development of these cumulative writing skills via interim instructional tasks leads to students producing text-based expository essays and citing text to support claims and opinions.

- Instructional coherence across content areas and grades emphasize interdisciplinary concept-based units of study that foster rigorous cognitive engagements for diverse groups of learners. (1.1)
 - The school leader's vision for closing the achievement gaps among students is the implementation of a concept-based curriculum that drives an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The integration of ideas and content designed to build cognitive dexterity includes technology, visual art, and philosophy supported in Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) units of study and instructional shifts aligned with Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). Literacy curriculum maps specifically address reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards across grades. Adapted units of study provide opportunities for students to go deeper into concepts allowing them to make perceptive connections across disciplines. Maps also include initial, formative, and summative assessments, learning targets, essential questions, and big understandings. As evidenced during classroom visits, English language arts and social studies activities are inter-related. For example, students in an eighth grade ELA class read articles on cultural oppression and discuss differing points of view and in a social studies class these students discuss popular culture during the depression period and present ideas and pose questions related to their point of view. As a result, students delve deeply into bodies of knowledge and are engaged in tasks that foster the transfer of knowledge to real life applications.
 - School leaders and teachers find ways to support and structure high level engagements for target groups of students. Through multiple entry points using the Depth of Knowledge Matrix students engage in activities that advance in complexity. Teachers provide small group instruction and one to one support incorporating graduated difficulty and rotation tasks into lessons to ensure the bottom third of students in all classrooms receive adequate support toward completion of robust tasks. Spiral teaching of key standards increase understanding and performance among the school's lowest third population as evidenced in Achieve 3000 data and increasing proficiency levels on rubric-based performance tasks.
- The principal's effective use of budget, resources, and talent supports the school's overarching goals and the delivery of sound instruction in order to meet the learning needs of all students. (1.3)
 - With an eye toward raising student achievement, support for identified instructional and professional goals result in multi-responsibility staff assignments such as the data specialist, test coordinator, and school programmer position. This dedicated position strengthens effective inquiry collaborations because teachers consistently have access to current data, which they extract from a central school-based system designed to facilitate research and development work. The school's objective of a 5% increase in students scoring a proficiency level of 3 or 4 on CCLS aligned unit of study culminating performance tasks is supported through a sustained consultant position. In turn, teachers

engage in professional work alongside an expert to create lessons and refine curriculum so that teaching adjustments meet the needs of all students.

- Intervention and enrichment programs designed to support diverse groups of learners, from the most at-risk to those who perform at an accelerated rate, are vital resources in the school's mission to meet the academic needs of all students. Therefore, project-based studies extend learning for higher performing students resulting in their independently completing a technology mini unit, representing their mathematical thinking through high-level math reasoning tasks, or conducting research on a controversial topic and presenting distinguished written persuasive arguments. Similarly, to ratchet gains in ELA and math as well as bolster student confidence the school has an Achieve Now Saturday Academy for over-age, under-credited students, which average fifty students in attendance per week. Additionally, groups of students also receive pullout and push-in academic intervention services from two teachers with intentional reduced schedules. This tiered response to intervention supplements differentiated and small group reinforcement from teachers that assume shared responsibility for the delivery of instruction to further progress and student learning toward school-wide goals.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance teacher questioning, student discussion, and planning in order to enrich student participation thereby increasing opportunities for application of critical thinking skills. (1.2)
 - The school believes that students learn best when they are able to make conceptual connections across disciplines, when their learning prompts questions and discussion, and when the use of data goes beyond performance levels to reflect diagnosis of student learning needs. Therefore, teachers work together to create interdisciplinary units that incorporate the workshop model and stimulate student-to-student engagements. Accountable talk stems and deliberate use of the “*turn and talk*” strategy from classroom to classroom generate opportunities for student dialogue. As such, students are able to ask questions of each other, dispel misconceptions, and think more deeply about what they are learning as noted during classroom visits. However, across classrooms, teacher questioning techniques and facilitation of whole group discussion do not consistently activate high level participation and chances to extend ideas surfaced during table discussions. Hence, discourse does not consistently delve deeply into queries posed or statements made by individual students. Consequently, not all students are exposed to rich conversations that challenge their thinking, promote acceptance of the ideas of others, or allow for productive debate. As a result, maximum cognitive development across subjects and grades is thwarted.
- Develop class-level systems for tracking student progress so that continuity in checks for understanding drive on the spot adjustments leading to hastened student progress and student ownership of learning. (2.2)

- The school uses a variety of data, formative and summative, to create assessments, match resources to students, and plan more effectively. Findings from a plethora of data trigger adjustments in pedagogic and instructional plans. Namely, the revisions in curriculum maps to align with ELA shifts that balance fiction and non-fiction reading with a greater emphasis toward non-fiction text exposure. Embedded assessments, baseline, mid line, and summative, capture student progress. Periodic tracking of student progress leads to flexible groupings and the creation of post assessment rubrics for a clear picture of strengths and challenges. Nevertheless, the lack of regular checks for understanding such as conferencing, exit slips, journal responses, and teacher note-taking impedes essential monitoring during the delivery of instruction resulting in missed opportunities for teachers to redirect students, identify misunderstandings, and make on the spot adjustments to teaching in order to accelerate student scholarship and foster self-assessment of learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Middle School for Art and Philosophy	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