

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Manhattan East School for Arts and Academics

04M224

**Manhattan
NY 10029**

Principal: Liliana Sarro

Dates of review: May 7 – 8, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Manhattan East School for Arts and Academics (04M224) is a middle school with 202 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 35% Black, 49% Hispanic, 10% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 95.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty ensure a safe and nurturing environment for students that support social, emotional, and academic development. (1.4)
 - Several steps have been taken in response to Office of Online Occurrences (OORS) data that showed an increase in demerits and occurrences last year. The school returned to its Advisory structure with a focus on “character education.” An advisory team adapts the “Respect for All” curricula to support personal and academic behaviors by focusing on topics such as: anger management, bullying, and informed online behavior, as well as perseverance, (teachers never grow tired of saying to their students, “you can do it”), organizational skills and academic goal- setting that is tracked for progress. Second, the principal, assistant principal and many of the teachers “adopt” two to three students whose “grades” the principal shares, are “not reflective of their potential.” Teachers record student behavior and academic performance daily and students report to their “mentor” who monitors progress. A web-based grading system reflects improved grades and homework submissions for targeted students as a result of this intervention. Third, parents are an active part of their children’s academic and personal growth as they are kept informed of progress, upcoming assignments, homework, and assessment scores by accessing this system. They readily articulate their understanding of the “uniform message on homework; there is no late homework,” attend meetings with teachers to discuss student progress, and all teachers provide parents with class syllabi. In particular, parents are exuberant in their praise of the art and music courses that are not “enrichment” but “a part of the curricula.” As one parent stated, “This school is all about the whole child.” Furthermore, parents express appreciation that their children are assigned research papers in every grade which they believe prepares them for high school and beyond. Finally, the assistant principal opens her door to all students who readily share that they will go to Ms. Cancel with “any problem at all.” These focused efforts result in a decrease in incidents by 60% and attendance at 95% this year.
- School leaders and teaches make purposeful decisions to emphasize Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) that engage students in rigorous academic tasks that promote higher level thinking in all students. (1.1)
 - All curriculum maps, units of study, and lesson plans are aligned to the CCLS with particular focus on writing, academic vocabulary, and explanation and following a logical path in mathematics. A bulletin board displays the words “teachers want their students to know”. Individual teachers and teams adjusted existing units and maps to include writing constructed responses in science and math; reflective writing in all content areas; raising the rigor in multiple choice questions on assessments; and moving from “equations to solve this” to “solving 3 equations” and determining which has the “greatest rate of change.” Additionally, greater emphasis is placed on reading informational and complex texts, and students infusing evidence into all written and oral responses. The English Language Arts (ELA) department team created a writing rubric for alignment across content areas and then supported their colleagues with implementation resulting in improved student

writing. For example, students saw gains by ten points on science lab reports from September, 2012 to March, 2013. In addition, to prepare students for college shared the school focuses on research writing. This begins in the sixth grade by introducing students to criteria for measuring website reliability by assessing how it is organized, when it was last updated, and where the site “lives” (URL), after which students justify its validity for their research. In one math class, students engaged in multi-tiered problem solving that lead them through a process for creating sets and culminated in a writing piece that asked them to discuss the purpose of the task, the skills they applied, and how it connected to prior learning. These efforts result in students making notable progress in their writing, and, therefore, foster high school and college readiness.

- Many of the tasks observed were a part of a larger body of work that occurred over several days, and, thus, provided students with opportunities to dig more deeply into content. For example, in an eighth grade ELA class students were analyzing a third Cinderella tale from a different culture by a ‘compare and contrast, construct, style, and content’ task and determining what can be inferred “about Filipino culture” based on the version read. Students engaged in this task through literature circle discussions for which they were held accountable for the role assignment they chose (summarizer, researcher, literary luminary, or questioner). The group who presented annotated their chosen passage directly onto the Smart Board so that the class, according to the teacher, “could see how they think about the text.” In a social studies class, students presented their analysis of excerpts from Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, and photographs or political cartoons that either depicted or commented on working conditions and child labor. As one student noted in response to a political cartoon that reflected work conditions, “it sucked the life out of children,” and another shared that “this [photograph] shows how unsafe and cramped factories were; they were inundated.” This led to a discussion about why workers remained in jobs despite the conditions, and a growing understanding of why families endured. Finally, in one science classroom visited, students articulated how, despite the size of a car in collision with a truck, the car could have the greater mass. The high cognitive demands of tasks and curricula enable all students to consistently engage is results in rigorous academic habits that demonstrate their progress toward mastery in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- A variety of assessment tools used consistently across the school inform teachers of the specific academic needs of their students and lead to curricula and instructional adjustments that improve learning outcomes for all students. (2.2)
 - A variety of assessments and rubrics to determine student progress and all syllabi that include the school-wide grading policy are aligned to the focus on writing across the curriculum, and Common Core implementation. To this end, the purchase of a web-based system this year enables teachers and teams to isolate key skills and understandings, and to determine a student’s strengths and challenges. This helps teachers determine additional supports such as math glossaries to build skill proficiency in targeted groups of students based on need (math glossaries), to create groups based on assessment data (mixed ability, student to student pairings for peer support), and to make ongoing adjustments to practice so that all students make progress. For example, math curricula now includes a daily writing component for students to explain and justify their processes, and students have moved from fill in the blank to writing constructed responses in science.

All task rubrics specify expectations and include feedback from the teacher so that students know what they need to do to perform at a higher level. In addition, teachers review assessment data with the principal and the assistant principal who consistently visit classrooms, discuss strategies for supporting all student learners, and hold conferences with teachers and students when indications on the web-based system signal an intervention. The practice of providing actionable feedback to students and teachers results in ongoing adjustments to daily instruction and curricula, and steady increases in English Language Arts and math Acuity benchmark scores from the fall to the spring.

- The school strategically uses resources that align to the school's goals, and leads to meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The school's organizational decisions are aligned to two of its data-based instructional goals: to improve ELA scores by incorporating writing across all content areas; and to improve student behavior by providing opportunities to enrich their school experience. Meeting these goals is accomplished by partnering with organizations that provide additional activities to engage students, and that provide instructional support in the teaching of writing for teachers. The school partners with *Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center's Manhattan East Project* and *Family Life Theatre* to offer students options for after-school community building activities. In addition, the School Leadership Team pushed for more arts instruction and was instrumental in initiating partnerships with the Frick Museum and Harbor Conservancy. The principal credits these programs for improved student behavior. Furthermore, despite budget cuts, the school successfully received a RESO A Grant to purchase SMARTboards for every classroom and laptops for students to support writing. Teachers' programs are structured to provide two periods per week for grade and department teams to meet during which teachers discuss student work, their literacy practices, and how to adjust curricula to incorporate more writing in classrooms. To further this school-wide mission, the school partners with *Teacher and Writers Collaborative* who work with English and social studies teachers to implement classroom practices that improve student writing. The focus on writing is evident throughout the school, on classroom walls and hallway bulletin boards where student written work in response to challenging tasks and the rubrics that measure them are on display. This results in the improved quality of student writing products over the course of this year.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen questioning and discussion techniques across classrooms so that all students are consistently provided with multiple entry points into challenging content and tasks, and demonstrate high levels of thinking. (1.2)
 - Students highlighted and wrote in the margins of text, modeled by students for each other on the SMARTboard, conducted a hands-on investigation regarding Newton's Law in science class, and were offered alternative versions of a math task: to create dot plots and graphs to test the validity of published data on M & M numbers. These tasks challenged students to articulate or write about their thinking, supported comprehension, and engaged students in their learning. However, providing multiple entry points into new content was not consistent across grades or in daily tasks, and therefore, students have fewer occasions to demonstrate higher-order thinking in classroom work products.

- The school uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching and emphasizes the importance of high level questioning and discussion across classrooms with professional development support from the network. All curricula include essential questions, and higher order tasks that deepen students' written work and push students to take ownership of their learning. As observed in lesson plans and classrooms visits, teachers carefully plan and deliver instruction to support student learning, and the use of structures such as highlighting texts, working with peers in small groups, and solving real world problems were seen in several classrooms, however, the focus on open-ended questions that invite discussion among students was less evident. For example, in most classrooms teachers generated questions directed to individual students, and follow-up questions about how they arrived at an answer, or asking for evidence to support a claim were not always prompted. In several classrooms, when a student asked a question, the teacher provided the answer and did not redirect it to other students to consider or refute. This results in limited opportunities for all students to engage each other in discussions and generate their own questions that would demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation in discussions and work products.
- Build upon ongoing professional collaborations that analyze assessment data in order to adjust practice to meet the needs of all learners and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers and increase student achievement. (4.2)
 - All teachers work in horizontal and vertical teams weekly during which curriculum maps and units of study are aligned to the Common Core. Following an analysis of baseline and benchmark assessments for a targeted group of students, instructional strategies are identified, implemented, and analyzed for impact on academic progress. This aligns to the school's instructional goals for continuing to implement the Common Core Learning Standards, and, based on last year's assessment results, to increase student achievement in English Language Arts and math. For example, the eighth grade team implemented a strategy to develop students' critical eye in assessing what a task requires, the process for successful engagement in it, and how to self-assess progress by using with SOLVE: Study the question, Organize the evidence, Link reasonable and logical facts to the question, Verify your answer, explain and examine your answer. Following analysis of Acuity data, the sixth grade team is focusing on making inferences as a reading support that also impacts writing and task comprehension. Teachers shared how this work has shifted their daily practice, for example, all math lessons now include a written component so that students connect their learning to the skill proficiency by answering questions such as: "What was the purpose of this activity?" and "What previous skills did you apply?" All teachers are focusing on academic vocabulary which students are expected to use in assignments and a hallway bulletin board serves as a reminder of what words each teacher wants students to remember. This results in students who can articulate how they interact with new knowledge and teachers who are strengthening their practice and raising task rigor. However, this is not yet coherent across the school, and, therefore, limits students from connecting what they are learning to a set of standards-based goals that increase student achievement for all learners.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Manhattan East School for Arts and Academics	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