# Quality Review Report

# 2012-2013

**Technology, Arts, and Sciences Studio**

**Middle School 301**

**185 First Avenue**
**New York**
**NY 10003**

**Principal: George Morgan**

**Dates of review: October 29-30, 2012**
**Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips**

# Part 1: The school context

## Information about the school

Technology, Arts, and Sciences Studio is a middle school with 170 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 24.1% Black, 58.2% Hispanic, 6.5% White, and 10.0% Asian students. The student body includes 7.6% English language learners and 31.2% special education students. Boys account for 54.7% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45.3%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 90.2%.

## Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

# Part 2: Overview

## What the school does well

- Teachers use differentiated instruction and small group learning to engage students in challenging tasks which push students' thinking and motivate them to do their best. (1.2)
    - Teachers routinely incorporate student choice and different modalities that lead to high student interest. For example, students in social studies classes have an array of possible projects in which to showcase learning about slavery, while students in science classes conduct weekly hands-on experiments dissecting a flower or identifying genetic traits. Utilizing two teachers in most classrooms, there are sufficient planned examples of supports, including graphic organizers and interactive notebooks, for struggling learners, with some extensions planned for higher achieving students. Classroom instruction consistently follows a workshop model approach, whereby students spend much of their time working in small groups, pairs or independently. Students engage fully in their learning tasks and speak excitedly of favorite projects, such as designing Native American dioramas and composing lyrics about community. As a result, there is a positive buzz of students participating in discussions and demonstrating higher order thinking skills, in work on display in hallways and portfolios.
- The principal's effective harnessing of resources of all types to support school goals results in steady progress in student achievement. (1.3)
    - After experiencing success in student growth percentiles in English language arts and math with a co-teaching model for special education and general education students, the school decided this year to extend the model of co-teaching to nearly all core subject classrooms. Therefore, out-of-classroom positions were eliminated in order to fund co-teaching classes that offer increased opportunities for small group learning, low teacher to student ratio, and a highly collaborative approach to instructional planning and delivery. Already, the impact of this organizational decision is evident in elevated collegiality, reduced instances by over 50% of class interruptions by student misbehaviors, more direct guidance with students on personal and academic issues, and better teacher practices. Furthermore, through a long-standing partnership with Lincoln Center Institute, the school provides students with coherent arts integration in their learning, which yields higher student engagement across classes.
- The principal pairs the observation of classroom teaching with constructive feedback that promotes professional discourse and provides clear expectations for improved practice. (4.1)
    - All teachers report, in person and via the School Survey, that the principal prioritizes being in each classroom multiple times a month, providing useful follow up suggestions and fortifying teachers' expertise. He sets and executes an ambitious agenda of short,

frequent cycles of class visits with candid written feedback that includes positive observations, concerns noted, and suggested next steps. This observational approach is rooted in the research-based rubric of Charlotte Danielson which is used to evaluate questioning and discussion techniques and using assessment in instruction, and which staff understand well from last year's book study and continued professional development. As a result, teachers share common instructional expectations and there are effective teaching practices across the school, as evidenced in classroom visits.

## What the school needs to improve

- Develop curriculum maps further across grades to ensure alignment with rigorous standards so that all learners are challenged. (1.1)
    - Since last spring, there has been good progress in developing and revising curriculum maps with professional development in backwards planning, a template provided, and exemplar modeled. As a result, the year-long maps are mostly in place in math, English language arts, social studies, and science, with thoughtful decisions about integrating Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) units of study and instructional shifts. However, there is redundancy in several curriculum maps of same units of study, actual texts, and assessments in different grades, so more work is needed to achieve vertical alignment. Moreover, some curriculum maps, such as those in Spanish, lack sufficient detail as they list topics, without essential questions or assessments. This weakens the effectiveness of curriculum maps in guiding instructional planning.
    - There is strong consistency of rigorous tasks and challenging curricula to push students' thinking at high levels. For example curricula for math classes include meaningful and complex tasks, such as determining the volume of irregular objects that result from intensive planning. However, there was limited evidence of the refinement of tasks based on analyses of student work, and some learning activities did not adequately reflect support for the needs of diverse learners. As a result, all students did not benefit from curricula designed to cognitively engage them in learning activities that meet their needs.
- Extend assessment practices to provide more feedback that improves student learning and promotes instructional adjustments. (2.2)
    - This year the school introduced a uniform grading policy that quantifies how both formative and summative assessments compute into a final grade. Students understand what is expected of them and teachers are accountable for multiple assessments. Yet, the grading policy is not aligned with key standards and curricula and does not sufficiently reinforce the school's goal of writing across content areas, as it does not reference a need for at least one long-term writing assignment per marking period. There are increasing examples of rubrics used for key assignments, which help students understand how work is evaluated. Yet some rubrics provide a summative number (such as 1 to 4) without or with minimal written constructive feedback to push students' thinking further. Finally,

students maintain portfolios of work in core subject areas. However, there are few examples of students' self-assessment of their learning and little evidence of ongoing checks for understanding by teachers, which weakens students' understanding of their learning needs and limits effective adjustments to instruction.

- Strengthen the school's monitoring of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions to maximize coherence. (5.1)
    - This small school has demonstrated improvement over time by making good decisions as a community of invested staff, students, and families. As a result, students show steady progress in learning outcomes, such as double-digit increases in students' proficiency rates in English Language Arts and math over two years, and instructional issues now outweigh school tone and concerns about student behavior. Underlying the school's improved position are strong and trusting relations between the principal and all key stakeholders. Yet the school lacks a systemic approach to monitoring progress of decisions, such as assessing students' writing progress or gauging the work of teacher teams. No benchmarks have been formulated, which then limits the school's capacity to make smart adjustments to decisions. Additionally, student work is reviewed regularly by co-teachers but not by larger teams or school-wide, so there is variation in teachers' expectations of high quality work. Finally, planned curricula are not sufficiently aligned to CCLS expectations which results in some redundancy across grades.

# Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

| School name: Technology , Arts and Sciences Studio | UD | D | P | WD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall QR Score | | X | | |

| Instructional Core | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school regularly…* | 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 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school …* | 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 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school …* | 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 |