



**Department of  
Education**

*Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor*

**Quality Review: Quality Review Report  
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support  
2012-13**

# **Quality Review Report 2012-2013**

**Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School**

**Secondary School Q167**

**91-30 Metropolitan Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11375**

**Co-Principals: Damon McCord and Patrick Finley**

**Dates of review: March 11-12, 2013  
Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School is a secondary school with 342 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 19% Black, 30% Hispanic, 29% White, and 21% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 96.8%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

This school is proficient.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Instructional coherence is reflected in high quality, standards-aligned curricula that foster learning experiences across the school while emphasizing higher order thinking and rigorous tasks that cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
  - Embracing an Expeditionary Learning model, robust Common Core-aligned, college-preparatory curricula are developed and coherently aligned across all grades and subjects, promoting deep engagement in learning and supporting students to achieve at high levels. Furthermore, curriculum comes alive for students by connecting learning to real-world applications, both to the local community and on a global scale. Vertical alignment of content, process, skills, and products are evident in the review of expedition overview maps for each grade and subject, including music. Academically rigorous learning expeditions, case studies, projects, and fieldwork inspire students to think critically, state a claim and provide detailed evidence, and produce high-quality work. For example, during science, seventh grade students spent several weeks focusing on a learning expedition entitled *It's Revolutionary*. Students worked through rigorous case studies and projects to determine which type of engine, combustion, fuel cell or hybrid, would be better for the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) bus system to help minimize pollution and the city's expenses. This was coupled with a visit to Cooper Union Car Engineering Labs, and students assuming the role of lobbyist by visiting the MTA to present a proposal about which type of "Green Bus" they support for cost and pollution reduction. As a result, culminating student projects demonstrate skills gained in literacy, numeracy, problem solving and mastery of the subject knowledge for all learners, including student with disabilities in Integrated Co-Teaching and self-contained classrooms.
- The co-principals promote organizational decisions that strategically support focused instructional goals and action plans through a distributive team leadership model that results in increased student achievement. (1.3)
  - The co-principals are very thoughtful in partnering with Expeditionary Learning as the model for this new school that will grow to include grades 6 through 12. To this end, instructional goals and long-range action plans are supported by innovative programming that provides over an hour for subject periods in addition to a "Crew" period every morning as an advisory for small groups of students. Sustained silent reading is a mainstay every Tuesday and a block of time on Wednesday afternoons is paramount to prioritizing professional development. Each classroom is equipped with state-of-the-art technology that is integrated into daily lesson plans. Furthermore, several configurations for structured professional collaborations are scheduled throughout teacher programs during several common planning periods and are effectively facilitated by a rotation of members. These teams of teachers share common groups of students and work diligently to understand what they need to succeed, holding themselves accountable through frequent analysis of student work. As a result, all teamwork is aligned to school's targeted instructional goals delineated in the school's "work plan", which is a long-range action plan. For example, one focused goal is for all students to show improvement on Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) tasks that assess the knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary for their success in college. By knowing what students need in order to make progress and support them towards mastery, these joint efforts result in continuous

refinements and revisions to curriculum, assessment and instruction, improved individual goal achievement by students, and rigorous student work products as evident in individual work portfolios and student-led conference portfolios for all content areas.

- Relationships among students, teachers and school leaders are respectful, resulting in an environment that is highly conducive to supporting the academic and personal growth of both students and adults. (1.4)
  - The school is a secure place where students are engaged in learning and appreciate the superior level of support they receive for their personal and academic development. This work begins in daily Crew meetings. Similar to advisory, each morning groups of no larger than 16 students meet with teachers, also known as Crew advisors, to follow a curriculum to address character learning targets that encompass the school's core values: respect, stewardship, intellect and curiosity, success and failure, and advocacy. Referred to as Habits of Work and Learning (HOWLS), these core values guide academic as well as social-emotional development. Crew advisors remain in constant contact with parents and assist students in preparing their portfolios of academic work for periodic student-led conferences where students articulate their progress toward goals to parents with support from the advisor. Almost 100% parent participation strengthens the success of these conferences. Additionally, Crews participate in an orientation that includes a four-day backpacking course for sixth graders and similar opportunities for seventh and eighth graders to develop supportive relationships. Furthermore, new teachers are supported to learn and understand the Crew experience through professional development and working with all teachers to continuously adjust the Crew curriculum to meet the developmental needs of all students. This advisory structure enables students to benefit from an inclusive environment, driven by school spirit and responsible behavior, which addresses the students' varying emotional needs in a highly differentiated manner. Furthermore, a dress code is fully embraced by all students every day, attendance is over 96%, and there is a very low rate of incidents that occur in the school.
  
- Distributive leadership is embedded in teacher team structures that systematically analyze student and teacher work with a focus on mastery of learning for all students. (4.2)
  - Professional collaboration by teams using an inquiry approach is a high priority that results in shared leadership and improved student mastery of expedition goals. Teacher teamwork is an embedded practice that is reflected in teachers' programs. Grade and department teams drive content, curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Distributive leadership is manifested in rotation of teachers as team facilitator, recorder, timekeeper, etc. and in the multiple recommendations impacting on the instructional core. For example, at both an eighth grade team meeting and an English language arts team meeting, a teacher facilitated group discussion and guided inquiry using a protocol for looking at student work. In one instance, the eighth grade team examined the work product of one student, noting his strengths and deficits to determine how best to support this student to produce a high quality project. Furthermore, recommendations were made to the student's teacher to try new strategies to support this student and others they share across their classes. In another team meeting, the English language arts team examined student work using a protocol to improve the task, provided take-aways for teachers to improve practice regarding sequence of instruction leading to the task, ensured vertical alignment of skills across grades and modified

classroom task by leveling reading material for students. As a result of this work, a continuous, constructive dialogue and process across teams refine the curricula as teachers work diligently to align projects and case studies with the rigorous expectations of the CCLS. Consequently, this cross-talk has focused teachers on systematically deepening their analyses of student work. As a result, student mastery, including mastery by special education students, is evident in displays and portfolios of rigorous student performance products prompted by high quality, culminating tasks of case studies and projects.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Further enhance teaching practices across all subjects and grades to reflect high levels of student discussion that ensure ownership of learning and student progress. (1.2)
  - The school has an unwavering belief about how students learn best that is based on their HOWLS, which serves as a meta-cognitive process of teaching students how to think and grow as learners. This is manifested in individual and groups of students cognitively engaged in rigorous and high quality tasks and activities which are the hallmarks of the Expeditionary Learning model and learning across classrooms. Teacher teams and individual teachers write detailed, coherent lesson plans using a wide range of strategies that emphasize the Universal Design for Learning approach to meeting the needs of all learners, especially special education students. Modeling, guided practice, high level questioning and application, and feedback cognitively engage students. Teachers use SmartBoards to vary modalities and provide one-to-one facilitation for individual and groups of students to target instruction. This is particularly evident in Integrated Co-Teaching classrooms where a team teaching model ensures that each student's needs are addressed. Furthermore, several samples of authentic work on display and in portfolios are derived from student engagement and critical thinking. However, in a few classrooms, pacing, cognitively demanding tasks and student discussion do not always lead students to be engaged in these rigorous learning experiences to the greatest extent possible. For example, in one sixth grade English language arts class, all students were working on the same task of identifying the meaning of several familiar picture symbols. This low level task was not cognitively challenging to most students who already displayed a solid understanding of symbolism. As a result, high levels of student thinking and participation are not always sustained across all classrooms and, therefore, ownership of learning is not maximized.
- Continue to strengthen school-wide assessment practices to ensure that feedback and next steps are understood and acted upon by all learners so that students continue to make progress. (2.2)
  - Teacher teams work diligently developing assessments that match learning targets. For example, extended written responses assess subject knowledge and reasoning while teacher-created performance assessments determine skill proficiency. This is coupled with well-developed, rigorous task-specific rubrics, such as a oral history rubric, "The Fugitive Slave" final paper rubric, and a debate speech rubric, that assess specific learning targets embedded in a particular case study or project. Additionally, across classrooms teachers use various strategies to check for understanding, such as stop-and-jot, turn-and-talk, entrance and exit slips, and questioning. Students frequently assess their work

or switch with classmates to peer-assess throughout daily lessons. Furthermore, grading policies are standards-based and directly aligned to specific learning targets for all subjects including Crew, theater and music, thus providing a clear portrait of student mastery of key standards and curricula. However, when discussing work products with individual students, not all students were able to articulate an understanding of the teacher feedback provided on the work, nor did they have a full understanding of rubric expectations. This was particularly evident when conversing with special education students and English language learners. As a result, these students were not aware of their next learning steps to make progress toward their goals, hindering potential academic growth.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: METROPOLITAN EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING SCHOOL	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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			
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed