

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School

Middle School Q250

**158-40 76th Road
Queens, NY 11366**

Principal: Vincent Randazzo

Dates of review: December 13-14, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Danielle DiMango

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

I.S. 250 The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School is a junior high-intermediate-middle school with 351 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 30% Black, 26% Hispanic, 19% White, and 25% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 93.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has successfully aligned curriculum and tasks within and across grade levels that address the rigorous demands of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the needs of all learners. (1.1)
 - In alignment with the CCLS and the instructional shifts within literacy and math, the school has developed rigorous curricula in all content areas and grades that embed key elements to promote higher-level thinking. Curricular design includes essential and guiding questions, assessments, comprehension skills, and writing and vocabulary goals. The school-wide online reading program, Achieve 3000, exposes students to nonfiction texts from the Associated Press based on each child's reading and interest level. The program monitors growth through multiple choice and extended response questions and consistently scaffolds to increase in complexity to provide both supports and extensions for all learners. It also measures college and career readiness levels and communicates student performance to staff, students and families. The math curricula focus on argument writing and increasing fluency and in all math classes students engage in discovery tasks that build upon skill-based weaknesses and culminate with a CCLS-aligned task that all learners are expected to complete. As a result, students have direct exposure to the CCLS expectations, leading to increased student performance in both math and English language arts. Data shows that 68.8% of English language learners made progress this year.
 - Teacher teams work closely with school leaders and network support staff to consistently plan and refine curriculum and tasks to best propel student learning to the next level. Tasks in all content areas are structured with pre-, midline and post-targets to use as assessment tools and to strengthen curricula. Staff use student end products from prior units to modify and plan units, lessons and activities for the next curriculum unit. One example involved teachers modifying the English language arts curriculum to decrease the amount of time spent on a personal narrative unit, as data revealed the need to increase student understanding of nonfiction writing. Additionally, school-wide data revealed that students across all grades struggled with graphs, charts and tables. This content area weakness became the focus of inquiry for the science department. In social studies, teachers blend content with literacy skills that focus on key standards such as cause and effect and in mathematics, and "practice makes perfect" tier 1 intervention strategies have become part of the curricular design in all grades. Because this strategic planning highlights clear plans and next steps for students, they are demonstrating progress in their ability to write and respond using multiple sources of information to prove arguments in all content areas and in the skill-based areas of focus addressed within the scaffolded tasks throughout the curriculum.
- The principal makes deliberate organizational decisions and uses resources effectively to support the school's instructional goals and address the learning needs of staff and students to improve student outcomes. (1.3)

- In support of the school-wide goal of increasing students' literacy and math skills and the long-range plan of developing the skills required of 21st century learners, the principal purchased Achieve 3000 and laptop computers for every classroom. This allows teachers to reduce class sizes in all English language arts classes where half of the students work with the online reading program and the other half engage in targeted support or extension groups, or spend time conferencing with their teacher. Additionally, he effectively utilized his budget to build a library and technology resource center stocked with computers and a plethora of nonfiction materials as well as leveled fiction books selected by student interest. Finally, he established effective partnerships with Queens College and St. Johns University. As part of these collaborations, the school's math teachers work with two student teachers in each classroom to better support student groupings. Also, to reinforce the school-wide college and career readiness goals, "One Day University" allows students to attend college level classes and talk with professors. As a result of these efforts, assessment data indicates significant increases in students' comprehension skills, particularly in analyzing nonfiction texts, student state math performance has increased 10%, and students are gaining a heightened awareness of how what they are currently learning is connected to academic and career expectations beyond their classrooms.
- The principal utilized the Schools in Need of Improvement grant for curriculum writing during the summer and provided teachers in all content areas with time to collaborate, plan and align their curriculum in preparation to begin the school year. Additionally, every Wednesday, teams engage in school-wide grade and content data meetings that include either an analysis of assessment data or student work, and there is also weekly common planning time in every teacher's schedule. As a result, teachers in all content areas have fully aligned their curriculum maps to the CCLS, have included clear multiple entry points and extensions evident in the maps and are able to work together to make decisions as to how their work translates to instructional practice and the development of additional resources to support all learners. Additionally, teachers in all content areas have developed and implemented engaging, scaffolded tasks that are evident in student portfolios and increase student progress towards mastery of the standards.
- The school has developed aligned assessment tools that accurately measure the effectiveness of curricular and instructional decisions and the impact on student outcomes, leading to strategic adjustments to instruction school-wide. (2.2)
 - As part of curricular design, teachers in all content areas have developed pre-, midline and post-assessment tasks that align directly to key standards addressed within each unit of study and have high levels of engagement to maintain student interest for increased participation in the learning process. Both teachers and students use aligned rubrics that detail key elements of the standards in every content area and allow for teacher and student written feedback that measure growth along the continuum throughout each unit of study. These tools are also used to set instructional goals as part of this process to track progress or lack of it over time. For example, students use skills from rubrics to complete goal rating sheets that detail pre-test skills not met, unit goals and actions that will be taken to achieve goals. Students then engage in planned activities throughout the unit and finally assess themselves based on the post assessment rubric. Growth within this

assessment structure is fifty percent of the grading policy for all content areas throughout the school. Additionally, teachers design their own multiple choice assessments using the Prosper program and use Achieve 3000 comprehension and vocabulary data to provide real time information directly aligned to key standards within the curriculum maps. As a result of the alignment of assessment practices, teachers get a clear understanding of their students' progress and share a common language with their students in order to provide next steps to meet their learning needs.

- Teachers engage in inquiry work to focus on identifying successful assessment strategies that include student self-assessment and accurate measurement of learning outcomes within a lesson. Collectively, in every classroom, teachers decided to build turn-and-talk protocols with pre-planned higher-order questions into their lessons to consistently monitor student response to content or specific pedagogic practices and provide peer models to demonstrate appropriate mastery of the expectations of the CCLS. This practice is consistent in all classrooms and allows students time to engage in discussions and make judgments about what they are learning. Teachers use this time to listen to student responses or read their writing and immediately make adjustments to the lesson. For example, in one English language arts class, a teacher used turn-and-talk questions along with both written and verbal responses from students to demonstrate the central idea within a text. As a result of these ongoing checks for understanding, teachers provide appropriate supports to increase students understanding of content and improve learning outcomes for all learners.
- Leadership has a clear instructional improvement vision that is consistently communicated to the school community and effectively targets the needs of students and the implementation of the CCLS. (3.1)
 - Last year, following a comprehensive needs assessment and curriculum and instructional audit within the school, the principal worked with the community to develop a three-year change strategy that includes redesigning all curricula to completely align to the CCLS, holding students more accountable for their learning through the use of developmental goal sheets, providing more intensive support for struggling students in English language arts and math, establishing and implementing feedback systems that focus on specific instructional effectiveness tools, and designing and building assessments into each unit of study to enhance assessment and strategically adjust instruction to further accelerate student academic achievement. The principal rolled out this action plan in three phases: initiation, implementation and revamp/revise. Each phase is discussed on a school-wide level where teachers are asked to reflect on what is going well, provide evidence of their findings, and memorialize strategies to be maintained and supported or revised. Currently in its second year of implementation, there is evidence within curriculum maps, classroom portfolios and feedback documents that clearly demonstrates that the school's work is accelerating student outcomes. This is demonstrated in the school Progress Report increasing from a C to an A and a significant increase in responses of all constituencies on the School Survey, placing them above the citywide average for middle schools in communication, academic expectations, safety and respect and engagement.
 - Students and their families are well informed of the school's instructional changes and state that their input in the roll out of these goals well-received

by both staff and administration. This year, goal sheets have progressed to be used as a communication link between school and home, and parents and teachers see them as a tool to gauge how children are performing in relation to the standards. Additionally, through carefully planned workshops based on parent need and interest culled from internal surveys, parents state they have gained a comfortable understanding of the CCLS, special education reform, the new school curriculum maps and ways to support the school's on-line reading program at home. As a result of this inclusive culture, the entire community successfully supports student success.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on the development of effective pedagogy to ensure instructional strategies and classroom activities maximize student engagement and ownership. (1.2)
 - It is a school-wide expectation that instruction supports student learning by allowing for multiple opportunities to engage in discussions and make judgments about what they are learning through turn-and-talk strategies. This practice is consistent in all classrooms and activities support the essential and guided questions evident in curriculum maps of all content areas. However, at this time, some classroom tasks are not designed to allow opportunities to extend this practice into whole group or individual student work time. For example, in one classroom, students engaged in rigorous discussions with higher order depth of knowledge questions using real life examples to explain their hypothesis of chemical change. In other rooms, although tasks commanded student either to discuss or write their opinions using text based evidence, questions or prompts did not cognitively engage all students to promote high levels of thinking and discourse, limiting their ability to fully participate in their own learning.
 - Across classrooms, teachers design multiple entry points, such as tasks translated into students native languages, tiered texts aligned to students reading levels, mentor texts, graphic organizers, sentence starters, practice makes perfect math exercises to address skill based weaknesses, and question prompts that compliment the curriculum and allow all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, full access on a regular basis. However, not all teachers are using these effectively during instruction to strategically guide students to meet the rigor of the tasks, limiting their relevance and effectiveness in supporting students' ability to produce meaningful work products.
- Continue to build instructional coherence through relevant, actionable feedback to articulate clear next steps that are understood as effective practices within a common framework to promote professional growth and reflection. (4.1)
 - The principal has structured observation and feedback systems that align to school-wide and individual teacher goals as well as elements of the Danielson Framework and information culled from student assessments. He visits classrooms on a daily basis and provides timely written and verbal feedback to teachers aligned to observed practice and student learning outcomes. Additionally, this year he has purchased Teach Boost, an online tool which allows him to capture and analyze instructional trends, provide feedback and inform and design professional development to meet the individual needs of teachers. However, at this point within the school-wide learning culture, teachers cannot fully

articulate the broader purpose as to how the feedback they receive translates into enriching and strengthening their pedagogy. As result, teachers do not fully own this work and administration's recommendations do not translate to steady changes to school-wide instructional practices, limiting its impact on consistently increasing student performance.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle 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