



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Quality Review  
Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning  
2013-2014**

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell**

**Middle School K061  
400 Empire Boulevard  
Brooklyn  
NY 11225**

**Principal: Shannon Burton**

**Dates of review: Jan 23-24, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Buffie Simmons**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell is a middle school with 779 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 89% Black, 9% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.5%.

### Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal effectively aligns resources to develop teacher practice and engage students in meaningful work to increase college and career readiness for all students. (1.3)
  - After spending the first six months as a principal and studying existing organizational structures, reviewing the school data, and meeting with various constituencies, the principal in collaboration with the cabinet made major changes in the way the school is organized for this school year. Teachers who were teaching out of their license area were reassigned to teach in their license area, or licensed teachers were hired to ensure that instruction is delivered by a licensed pedagogue. Furthermore, structures for giving teachers' targeted support include the assistant principals, the math chair, inter-visitations, and newly hired teachers are paired with strong experienced teachers to hone on their teaching practices. In addition, teacher meetings are embedded in teachers' schedule. The school's schedule gives faculty time to work together collectively and collaborate during the school day. Moreover, to support the school's instructional goals, school leaders allocated additional funds to allow teacher teams to meet after school to further their work in aligning the CCLS to the curricula. As a result, other organizational decisions were made to further support students learning. For example, Achieve 300 was purchased to support teachers in tracking each student's reading skill coupled with targeted interventions, and the school's schedule was revised to add more instructional time to each classroom period. Moreover, school leaders hired a fourth assistant principal, and nine part time staff members to further support the school's goals of increasing students' college and career readiness. In total, the school has four assistant principals, and all are scheduled to teach classes during the school day and perform their administrative duties. The school leaders organizational decisions, effective use of resources, and hiring practices support the school's instructional goals as evidenced by increased academic gains in special education students' in their Lexile levels by one benchmark for 25%.
- The school is a safe place, which cultivates effective partnerships, and students appreciate the level of support they receive, thus fostering their personal and academic development. (1.4)
  - The school leaders maintain an active presence in the hallways and outside the school, ensure smooth transitions for the hallways, arrival, and dismissal. Staff members greet students and usher them into the classrooms, thus creating a welcoming and timely start to each class. In addition, the school hosts events to promote positive social and academic behavior. For example, the school conducted a middle school spelling bee competition that yielded 3 winners who shared \$1,750 dollars in scholarships. Also, perfect attendance and other student accomplishments are celebrated and promoted through assemblies, thus furthering the school's common values. In this regard, families and students shared that an "open door" policy permeates the school. Staff is

available on a daily basis for families and all students. Students articulated that they feel safe and teachers support them if they are experiencing academic and/or personal challenges. In addition, the school partners with an outside the OHEL Mental Health organization which focuses on female empowerment, build self-esteem, and develop social skills. In this regard, the cabinet shared case studies of female students who participate in the mediation program. Furthermore, during student meetings, students expressed that peer mediation allows them time to discuss problems with each other and work things out before matters get out of control. Students believe this approach prevents violence and helps them to learn how to talk things out. Recently, the ladder of referral was modified to provide teachers guidance on how to respond to discipline problems, and identify infractions that require immediate attention of a dean and/or guidance counselor. In addition, the school adopted and agreed to conduct monthly character traits (respect, responsibility, perseverance, caring, self-discipline, citizenship, honesty, courage and fairness) to further develop student's character. For example, assistant principals meet with individual students involved in any major infraction and provide opportunities to modify the nature of consequences based on the choices the student makes during the suspension period. This gives students an incentive to self-monitor their behavior and experience the positive results of making good choices. Furthermore, the school has three academies (Britou-Moore, APEX and Global Leadership) that support the school's goals of meeting students' needs. The academies afford opportunities for students to receive more focused attention by group of teachers who meet minimally twice a week to discuss interventions around supports for social and emotional issues. As a result of the partnerships and organizational changes, infractions have decreased by more than 30% for the first six months of school compared to the same period last school year.

- Teachers use assessments and common measures that are aligned to the curricula to inform instructional decisions and planning, thus establishing a clear understanding of students' performance and progress. (2.2)
  - The school uses common assessments aligned to key standards, rubrics, and exit and entrance slips to determine benchmarks for students' progress across classes and grades. For example, according to recent Acuity results sixth graders needed additional work with fractions, seventh graders needed more support through modeling, and eighth graders needed more practice with order of operations. Similarly, recent assessments in English language arts (ELA) identified areas of concern for sixth graders in making inferences, and students in seventh and eighth grades needing extra support in reading strategies. In addition, the school uses an array of assessments, such as performance tasks, NYS examinations, conferencing, unit exams and periodic assessments to further inform students' support for increasing achievement. Furthermore, teachers use this data to coordinate and provide additional support to students through small group instruction to monitor students' progress, and create goals for students. As a result, teachers effectively adjust curricula units and have observed gains as evidenced by students' progress on the unit assessments.

- During a teacher meeting, teachers shared student work, and one teacher said, “I cannot believe how much progress the student has made this year.” Teachers use benchmark data to analyze standards that demonstrate strength, challenge, and in areas for need of improvement. Teachers use rubrics to engage students in self-assessing their learning. During the interview, students were able to speak to the use of rubrics and how they develop their next learning steps. Students also expressed that they have the opportunity to assess their classmates’ work. Furthermore, school leaders indicate that they review assessment results and meet with teacher teams across grades and content to discuss students’ progress. The school leaders organize and analyze information on student outcomes to identify trends and patterns to inform further interventions. In addition, the consistent practice of using rubrics and teachers’ feedback, allow students to become more aware of what they have mastered and what they still need to master. For example, on a forensic anthropology performance task, feedback given to students provided clear next steps and asked students to cite references or quotes, and to organize forensic investigation steps. Students agreed that teachers’ feedback “help them do better work and increase their score on performance tasks.”
- The school communicates with families and messages high academic expectations around the CCLS to increase involvement and maximize student achievement.(3.4)
  - The school consistently shares high expectations regarding student progress in myriad ways that include one-to-one parent and student meetings, progress reports, emails, weekly correspondence entitled “The Roar,” and telephone calls. In addition to the scheduled parent-teacher conferences and report card distribution periods, families articulated that the schools’ approach to provide information in a diversified manner assure them that no matter where they are they know the school is able to easily reach them. Students and families say that the school hosts periodic sessions to prepare both students and their families for future academic endeavors linked to college and career readiness. For example, parents shared about the many partnerships with colleges – Medgar Evers College and Berkeley University, an event designed for families to meet representatives from numerous high schools, each showcasing their school attributes as the best fit for their children. Students are given high school books with information about prospective schools of interest and are supported with questions and concerns about high school requirements. In addition, teachers and school leaders hold students and parents accountable on attendance, behavior, and academic expectations established in the beginning of the school year. These contracts followed by frequent discipline assemblies underscoring the school’s priorities for personal and academic growth. Furthermore, teachers initiate immediate parent contact for those students who show ongoing signs of academic and/or behavioral distress. Progressive discipline policy and a team approach to academic intervention further support students to overcome obstacles to learning. Also, the school’s internal capacity for guidance and advisement supports is enhanced by developing partnerships with external organizations. As a result, students receive high school preparation classes after school and during school breaks and have access to cultural institutions as well as college

campuses. Parents and students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to attend and visit colleges, thus preparing students for their next academic level and personal growth.

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

- Ensure consistent curricula alignment to the CCLS across all grades and subjects to engage students in cognitive challenging tasks to promote college and career readiness for all learners. (1.1)
  - The recent English language arts and math programs assist teachers into implementing the CCLS, particularly focusing on text complexity, reading complex informational texts, and persuasive and informational writing. These new programs have a strong emphasis on academic vocabulary, scaffold strategies, and learning by developing a deep understanding of concepts critical for literacy and math across the grades. The revised literacy and math pacing calendars assure school-wide consistency of instruction and a framework for teacher to develop academic tasks. In order to close the achievement gap and promote postsecondary readiness in all grades, the school offers Regents classes. The school's coursework exposes students to a variety of coursework focused on infusing rigor into their learning. The honors program, designed after reviewing student work and data, addresses the needs of higher achieving students by enabling them to take Regents' classes. However, not every student is exposed to academic rigorous content. Modifications to the curricula for English language learners (ELLs) and special education students are defined within curriculum maps and include modeling, vocabulary development strategies, the use of graphic organizers, pre-review of notes for lessons, paired activities and close exercises. Unit maps are detailed with indications for resources and supports so that teachers are able to elaborate lesson plans that address standards and cognitively engage students. Nonetheless, even with this support, instructional plans are broad and do not yet embed rigorous academic tasks to deepen students' thinking for all learners. Therefore, developing missed opportunities to challenge all students thinking, close learning gaps, and encourage college and career readiness.
- Ensure that instruction meets the entry points of all students in all subject areas so that students are consistently afforded supports to meet and exceed academic standards. (1.2)
  - Leadership and faculty uniformly emphasize that all students can learn but not in the same way. While visiting many classrooms, students were strategically grouped based on their need, working on varied activities and having discussions using text evidence with one another, informed by the exit slips from prior lesson or from recent unit assessments. This practice, however, was not seen across all the classrooms that were visited. In some instances, students were working on the same assignment as a whole class without direct targeted instruction or the teacher dominated the lesson by posing all the questions and leading the direction for the class discussion. For example, in one classroom, students engaged in rigorous discussions with higher order depth of knowledge questions using real life examples to explain how scientists

gather and interpret data to show that the Earth is continuously changing. 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. In classes that comprise students with special education students and English language learners, the lessons inconsistently included scaffolds, models, and representations of concepts and questioning techniques to deepen students' thinking. As a result, some students are not being met at their entry points or having their thinking pushed by either the teacher or classmates, hence limiting opportunities for higher level thinking and participation.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name:	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?		<b>X</b>					
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
<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 supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			<b>X</b>				
<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 student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>