

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Dr Susan S. McKinney**

**Middle/High School K265**

**101 Park Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11205**

**Principal: Paula Holmes**

**Dates of review: February 10-11, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Barbara Freeman**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Dr. Susan S. McKinney is a secondary school with 503 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 72% Black, 24% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 36% of the students enrolled and girls account for 64%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 84.3%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers ensure curricula are well aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, (CCLS) with targeted focus on rigorous tasks to ensure access to demanding curricula for all students. (1.1)
  - The school continues to adapt and adjust curricula to meet the needs of all students with curricula in all subject areas recognizing the instructional shifts, such as reading more complex texts and emphasizing deeper mathematical conceptual understandings. The middle school selected new materials to support English language arts and math instruction while other curricula areas utilize the State's scope and sequence, and continue to refine units of study and performance tasks to meet the requirements of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). High school students are utilizing rigorous course materials from Engage NY, Regents prep materials, content specific text /trade books, and teacher created units of study, in alignment to relevant content standards. With direction from teacher leaders, teams of teachers work collaboratively and strategically on adjustments to curricula, ensuring coherence from grade to grade and across departments. For example, additional materials were required to supplement the CMP3 math program in the middle school to address the gaps in student learning so math teachers collaborated to revise their curricula by incorporating additional tasks to meet this need. This approach allows the school to provide a well-defined and structured curricula supported by highly demanding tasks which contribute to college and career readiness for all students.
  - Through the creation of performance tasks and units of study, teachers ensure that higher order thinking skills across grades and subjects are addressed using the Depth of Knowledge framework to continue to design tasks that foster the development of rigorous habits by all learners and develop effective questions to sustain high levels of student thinking. Teachers of students with disabilities and English language learners departmentalize in order to share strategies and supports, such as the type of questions and other scaffolds for students to be successful in utilizing higher order thinking skills. A grade 10 literacy unit on The Power of Arts and Culture emphasized citing strong and thorough evidence to support students' analysis of what the text says, explicitly as well as inferentially, and write arguments to support claims in their analysis of topics and texts and exploration of areas of interest to formulate their arguments. Teachers also use technology software such as Rosetta Stone to further support rigor in individualized work for students who are in the beginning stages of acquiring English as a second language. This enables all students to access curricula with rigorous tasks that allow them to exhibit high levels of thinking, as they integrate multiple sources of learning in order to produce exemplary work with real-life implications.
- All teachers are highly engaged in collaborative inquiry to support school goals by consistently looking at student work/data, resulting in improved teacher practice and accelerated student learning. (4.2)

- In structured professional teams, all teachers focus on crafting and implementing a variety of instructional initiatives to support school goals. Teams across grades and departments are charged with monitoring adjustments of instructional plans to ensure effective implementation of the CCLS and meet the expectations of the Danielson framework. Thus all members of teams participate in activities such as syllabus writing, performance task development, analyzing student work samples and developing common assessments. The English language arts team is, as the principal states, "the thread of the building", working intensively with all other teams to ensure that the instructional shifts are embedded in curricula and instruction across all disciplines. During the high school history teacher team meeting, teachers reviewed data binder entries from the prior semester and samples of student work, to determine what adjustments needed to be made to units of study, assessments, and instructional practices, to further support student learning. For example, data suggested a need to further align common essay assessments to Regents formats in order to provide additional supports for students who are required to pass Regents exams to meet their graduation requirements so teachers revised the assessment to mirror the Regents. This has strengthened teachers' capacity to make effective changes to curricula, as evidenced by a review of curriculum artifacts and related student work and data.
- School leaders and department chairs are deeply involved in the school's inquiry work in order to determine progress towards the school's instructional goals, ensure students' needs are met, and further deepen teachers' capacity in utilizing data and student work to inform the delivery of high quality instruction to improve achievement by all students. For example, one observed team discussed how well students with disabilities performed on a common assessment, due to teachers' focus on utilizing graphic organizers to support students thinking on the short answer, written, portion of the assessments. Teachers also discussed how they supported students by allowing them to answer questions in complete sentences, create visual representations for their answers, and self-evaluate their work. This has resulted in an improvement in teaching practices, as measured by observation reports, and promoted increased student progress, as evidenced by group and classroom level data.
- The principal thoughtfully aligns resources to instructional goals and long term plans and uses staff time strategically to maximize teacher capacity to deliver high quality instruction to all students. (1.3)
  - The principal makes deliberate decisions regarding the school's budget in order to address instructional goals and meet student needs. After a review of spring assessment data and the school's instructional goals and foci, planning for the next school year begins during the summer months. This year, the school focused on strengthening the units of study in the middle school and providing additional supports needed for English language learners so the principal purchased additional software programs to support independent work sessions for these students and increase their academic vocabulary to support their successful completion of writing tasks in all content areas. In alignment to long term plans, including increased support for an arts initiative, the principal secured outside funding for materials, residencies, and excursions. In addition, to

support students who are not passing Regents exam, the school has allotted additional funding for intensified coursework, via the implementation of extended time and afterschool programs. Further, students in need of recovery periods, participate in blended learning utilizing technology based intervention programs from Study Island and the IZONE. Professional development is also provided to support the school's ongoing instructional focus on writing, specifically improving students' proficiency in responding to essay questions in order to strengthen their performance on Regents exams. School leaders have adjusted their schedules to align their work hours to the extended day schedule for grade 11 and 12 students in order to lower the cost of per session hours for work by administrators. These strategic moves and decisions have allowed the school to thoughtfully allocate resources to fund a range of additional supports necessary for all students to succeed in producing high quality work, thus ensuring instructional goals and long range plans are attained.

- The principal has structured the use of teacher and student time to foster team meetings in order to ensure regular and sustained focus on student progress in improving their academic achievement. For example after a transcript review, in conjunction with the school's guidance counselor, teachers collectively help to determine what courses need to be offered. Similarly, in order to address college and career readiness, teams have discussed the adjustments necessary for student advisory periods to be used to meet this need. Planning time is included in the school's master schedule by departments and grades in order to ensure teachers are constantly and collaboratively discussing student progress by content areas and grade levels, on a weekly basis, while engaging in self-assessment and sharing of best practices. This helps to inform school leaders of any additional supports that may be necessary, including professional development to strengthen teachers' instructional practice or content knowledge as teachers continue implementing the CCLS. Student schedules are created based on grade requirements as well as the need for some students to repeat courses, and teacher schedules are aligned to student and school needs so that instructional time is utilized effectively and efficiently in engaging all students in challenging work. As a result, teachers are highly focused on their professional responsibilities as well as on effectively making adjustments to unit of study and lesson plans, thus improving their instruction and ensuring that performance tasks remain demanding for all students.
- School staff implements multiple structures that provide a safe and inclusive environment, leading to ongoing academic progress for all students. (1.4)
  - The principal has an open door policy for students, families, and staff to address school concerns expeditiously. In order to provide social-emotional support, the guidance counselor and school psychologist meet daily and provide interventions to ensure difficulties do not escalate. Programs such as Project Male, Police Athletics League (PAL), and McKinney Scholars provide positive reinforcement for behavior and academic success. In addition, the school is moving students with disabilities towards the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to meet their academic needs as they transition from the middle to the high school. Students also have the ability, through student government, to make

suggestions to the principal on social events and additional academic offerings that students would like to have in their daily program. This has resulted in a positive environment allowing students to grow and develop as evidenced by their improved achievement on common assessments.

- The school has organized itself well to address students' academic and behavioral needs. Guidance counselors are assigned to each student and students and their families are aware of the staff members to whom they can address their concerns. A parent stated, "They know every move my child's makes in this building." The Children are Reason Enough (CARE) team addresses students who are exhibiting personal and academic difficulties and are charged with instituting an intervention plan which is monitored for adjustments over time. Attendance meetings are also conducted with personalized letters and parent meetings to support students with chronic attendance problems and support has been provided to students and families to address bullying and cyber bullying. These practices have strengthened students' social and emotional learning skills, leading to a reduction of the number of suspensions schoolwide, as evidenced by data from Online Occurrence Reports.

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

- Continue to strengthen the alignment between curricula and assessments practices to maximize the effectiveness of curricular and instructional adjustments in improving learning for all students. (2.2)
  - The school has made strategic decisions to ensure that assessments are focused on attaining instructional goals. Teachers administer assessments such as performance tasks, interim benchmarks, pre and post unit test, and entrance/exit tickets as well as teacher made tests. The school has designed several documents that highlight students' performance on those assessments and all teachers have binders with data that reflect student progress and samples of student work. Several teachers also include homework samples in order to get a better picture of students' performance outside of the classroom. Teachers discuss student performance in grade/department team meetings and examine student progress results as they share feedback on student performance. Students are provided with feedback through teacher conferences, progress reports, and report cards. Rubrics and course syllabi describe how student work is graded and the appropriate percentages assessments play in students' grade and total score. However a review of the data binders showed a strong focus on class level student performance data, rather than on the specific needs of individual students, thus lessening teacher capacity to accurately develop a clear profile of individual student mastery of grade level content specific goals.
  - Teachers consistently monitor student work and common assessment data in order to determine how well students are progressing. The use of rubrics and exit slips promotes students' self- assessment and higher level questioning requiring students to summarize and paraphrase, supports the school's goal to increase student performance in the essay portion of Regents exams by allowing students to constantly practice these skills. Medial summaries and informal interruptions allow teachers to monitor and check for understanding throughout the course of lessons.

Teachers also provide feedback to students during their peer discussions. However, student work samples are rated in large categories such as “high, medium”, and “low”, without characteristics of the qualities leading to those classifications, thus lessening teachers’ ability to make more precise adjustments to curricula and offer focused feedback to all students in order to move them to the next level.

- Continue to support the shared beliefs that are informed by the Danielson Framework and aligned to curricula, so that teaching strategies consistently provide multiple pathways to accelerate learning for all students. (1.2)
  - Across classrooms, the school’s theory of action on how students learn best is grounded in providing classroom environments that are collaborative, with teachers modeling best strategies and providing opportunities for students to practice new skills while engaging each other in discussion. In order to deepen their work in domain three of the Danielson Framework, teacher questioning and increased opportunities for student interactions are being monitored and feedback is provided by school leaders. Lessons show evidence of the instructional shifts across content areas and grades, as evidenced by a high school English language arts lesson in which the teacher posed high level questions in order for students to create discussion profiles for each other, as they analyzed the relationship between style and meaning for various poets and a grade 6 math class where students were encouraged to work in groups in order to create division stories based on specific measurements. However, in a few cases, observed lessons did not illustrate deep application of the instructional shifts, resulting in teaching practices that are not thoroughly aligned to the school’s curricula nor well informed by team discussions of best pedagogical practices.
  - Common instructional practices such as accountable talk, Socratic circles, and peer discussions focused on defending and persuading points of view were evident during the practice phase of observed lessons, providing all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, with multiple points of entry that facilitate their learning across grades and content areas. For example, in a math class, students were engaged in writing and explaining the process they used to solve the posed problem, thus illustrating varied points of view and strategies for learning. However, the use of extensions and scaffolds for diverse learners, especially high achieving students, was limited, hampering full engagement of all students in highly challenging work and resulting in missed opportunities to further strengthen higher order thinking skills for all learners.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

| School name: Dr. Susan S. McKinney  | UD                    | D        | P                 | WD       |                   |           |                       |
|---|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| <b>Overall QR Score</b>   |                       |          | X                 |          |                   |           |                       |
| <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?   |                       |          |                   | X        |                   |           |                       |
| 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? |                       |          | 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 supports 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 those expectations?   |                       |          | 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 student 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 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?   |                       |          | 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>   |                       |          |                   |          |                   |           |                       |
| <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> |