

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

M.S. 243 Center School

Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 03M243

**100 WEST 84 STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10024**

Principal: Elaine Schwartz

**Dates of review: November 13-14, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Ilene Altschul**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

M.S. 243 Center School is a/an Junior High-Intermediate-Middle School with 229 students from 5 through grade 8. The school population comprises 16% Black, 12% Hispanic, 64% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 2.6% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 97%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) emphasizing rigorous habits and academic tasks promoting college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - The school offers a challenging curricula including regents algebra for all eighth graders, literature, writing workshop, and topics such as habitats and hydroponic garden in science, and Colonial Africa and Genghis Khan in social studies. The school runs on a trimester schedule enabling the students to receive instruction in twelve units in writing workshop, science and social studies thereby ensuring coherent curricula. All curricula is developed by the teachers and are fully aligned to the CCLS as evident by use of complex texts across all curricula areas, in-depth discussions using text based evidence, and written projects where students take a stance and support their arguments. For example in a mini unit on United Nations, students work in groups representing each nation and participate in a debate. In the social studies course on China, students are studying the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism and the learning is supported by literature assigned by grade level and ability. Students with disabilities are held to the same standards and provided the same access to the curricula. Through project-based learning, all students work collaboratively and actively participate in class discussions and tasks. As a result of rigorous curricula, all students are demonstrating their thinking, are being academically challenged, and are prepared for the next grade level, particularly high school as indicated on the progress report.
- Teachers' instructional practices provide all learners with multiple opportunities into the curricula so that all students demonstrate high levels of thinking, participation and ownership in the work products. (1.2)
 - Across the school, all teachers understand the needs of the middle school adolescent and has structured the school around the philosophy that students in grades five through eight learn best cognitively through integrated coursework based on their intellectual developmental stage rather than their age level. Besides Latin and mathematics, all courses are mixed grade levels promoting a child centered approach focused on peer interaction and group work. This was evident throughout all classes. In literature, students were discussing Animal Farm by George Orwell using the Socratic Seminar and finding evidence to defend their position. In hydroponic science, students were working in groups researching photosynthesis to create a book. The SETSS teacher provides teacher support as well as assistance to students with disabilities (SWD). This teacher additionally works carefully with classroom teachers in planning next steps to address student individual needs. The SETSS teacher works with the students on developing organizational skills, discussion or class assignment preparation. In the class setting, teachers use different presentation methods to address the modalities and learning styles such as video clips, photographs, graphic organizers, and scaffolded questions. Through the collaborative projects, students receive ongoing peer feedback pushing them to higher levels of achievement. In writing workshop students participate in class edit where a student shares a writing piece and their peers offer feedback. Students state that the feedback helps them improve their writing. Students are consistently encouraged to participate and as a result they are willing to take risks, are engaged in challenging tasks and are demonstrating high academic achievement.

- Through a strategic advisory structure, the school's theory of action to culture building ensures that every student is well-known by an adult and provided opportunities to be heard thereby supporting the academic and personal growth of all students. (1.4)
 - The advisory system is at the heart of the school's approach to social-emotional and academic learning. Every student is assigned an advisor for the school year. The role of the advisor is to meet with the student formally once a week as well as check in with teachers to ensure that the student is not facing any challenges. Through journal writing, students have an alternative method to communicate with their advisor. If a student has missed three homework assignments, a teacher would report it to the advisor of the student for a conversation about responsibility. The advisor is the contact for all communication with parents. The school additionally has an advisory council which has a student representative from each advisory. The council discusses school issues such as dress code as well as determines themes and topics for the schools mini-units. For example, one student suggested film making for a mini-unit and the school decided to add it to their syllabus. Another student is working on trying to start a newspaper. Students are integral into the decisions around their projects and selecting some of the activities. In addition to the supports through the advisory, the school offers homework help afterschool for any students that wish to participate. The guidance counselor works with students as needed to further support any concerns. All students agree that the advisor is someone who is always available to help but any teacher is available before or after school as well. Students all feel that the school is very supportive and they learn a lot. One student stated that he has friends in this school whereas in his past school kids would make fun of him. As evidenced by the learning environment survey, the respectful and inclusive environment positively impacts the academic and personal behaviors of all students.
- All members of the staff convey high expectations through the school culture, connected to college and career readiness, in alignment with the citywide expectations, to ensure that every student is successfully prepared for the next level. (3.4)
 - The school's expectation of professionalism is inherent in their culture. All teachers develop their own curricula, work collaboratively to ensure that students' needs are being met, share best practices and make themselves available to provide academic and emotional support before or after school and during the lunch period. Teachers are continuously self-assessing and reflecting on their practice. Through professional collaborations and discussions, teachers evaluate their lessons and the student outcomes to ensure success. Teachers state these discussions, provide them with support from their colleagues to offer feedback and "bounce ideas off". In addition, the conversations have helped them better understand the expectations of the common core. Therefore, teachers are fully cognizant of the school wide beliefs and protocols resulting in student growth.
 - Teachers and staff establish a culture for learning where emphasis is placed on the content and high levels of participation. Students fully recognize that the school is preparing them for a path connected to college and career readiness. The students state that they are expected to do a lot of essay writing, group projects, research and discussions. In addition, they learn time management skills, organization skills and develop independence. Students appreciate feedback from their peers as well as the teacher in order to learn and show progress. The advisory system sets high expectations and holds the students accountable for success. The school provides progress reports to families that are written by students. Additionally, students lead the parent teacher conference with the advisor serving as a facilitator, reviewing what they are doing well and

communicating areas that they need to improve. Parents concur that the expectations are very high and that the school “has raised the bar”. As a result, all constituents work collaboratively to ensure that students are making progress, are taking ownership of their learning and are prepared for the next grade.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen assessment practices to include actionable feedback through rubrics and common assessments resulting in adjustments to the curricula and students being aware of their next learning steps. (2.2)
 - Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments to identify progress and student mastery. During the visit teacher teams were analyzing the results of the State tests to identify patterns and trends. In the math team, the teachers identified equations and expressions as an area of weakness and were strategically increasing instruction in that area. Teachers give the baseline English Language Arts (ELA) performance assessment and math diagnostic assessments in addition to quizzes and end of unit tests. However, the ELA performance assessment has not been reviewed or graded therefore limiting its capacity to impact student progress. Teachers track the student data in a grade book or on a spreadsheet but there is little evidence that the data is resulting in adjustments to the instructional decisions in all curricula areas. The final projects and essay writing are assessed but students often receive check or check plus. On written work, the majority of comments refer to grammar and spelling rather than content. Teachers list the components that are part of the evaluation for each task but not in a rubric form explicitly stating the expectations to receive a particular grade. The use of rubrics was inconsistent throughout the school. Consequently, not all students are receiving actionable feedback and are not aware of their next steps towards increased mastery.
- Strengthen the observation process to ensure that feedback is aligned with teachers' goals and supported by professional development to elevate instructional practices. (4.1)
 - The principal regularly observes and indicates that feedback relates to the Danielson framework. The veteran staff states that the feedback they receive is helpful and that the principal is available to discuss any suggestions regarding a lesson. One teacher received feedback that the lesson was too teacher directed and needed to increase opportunities for student to student discussion. Teachers state that the principal encourages them to extend their learning outside of the school through additional courses or professional development and as a result a teacher went back to school for a masters in Special Education at the principal's recommendation. The professional development sessions on-site are primarily whole school and provide the teachers with opportunities for collaborative planning, sharing of best practices, and addressing the needs of the students rather than differentiated according to teacher needs or goals. Through the observation process, conversations and self-evaluation, teachers are made aware of their strengths and suggested next steps, however based on the observation artifacts, feedback is limited and mostly identifies the highly effective qualities. Consequently, the observation process is not strategic in determining individual needs of teachers and aligning professional development to further advance their instructional practices.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: M.S. 243 Center 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 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	

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 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

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 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	

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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