



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

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

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence**

**Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 03M256**

**154 WEST 93 STREET  
MANHATTAN  
NY, 10025**

**Principal: Candida Frith**

**Dates of review: April 8-9, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Ilene Altschul**

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

### **Information about the school**

M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence is a Middle school with 159 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 48% Black, 48% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 87.4%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School staff is in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) emphasizing the instructional shifts to increase rigor and student achievement. (1.1)
  - M.S 256 has adopted the Expeditionary Learning literacy program and Connected Math program. Since the beginning of the year the English language arts teachers are addressing curricular concerns that include reading a complex whole class text that doesn't address the varied reading levels in each class. Teachers are working collaboratively to review each grade curriculum map and determine the skills that overlap such as character analysis, citing evidence, 'getting the gist', and increasing vocabulary. Teachers are utilizing graphic organizers, visuals, collaborative group work or partnerships and sentence starters to support students including English language learners and special education students. The principal suggested that teachers follow the program for three days and utilize the other two days for small group instruction. Teachers are integrating similar themed texts but at a level matched to the students' independent reading level. Teachers are modifying the curriculum to include a stronger writing component in conjunction with the social studies curricula. During a social studies lesson students were learning about world religions and the objective of the lesson was to use evidence to support ideas. In mathematics, teachers receive professional development from a Lehman college coach to identify and address the gaps such as percentages, ratio and proportion in the curriculum. There has been a shift in instruction to ensure that students understand the relevance of the mathematical concepts. In an 8th grade class students were solving an algebraic problem to determine which cell phone plan would be best. As a result of collaborative planning, curricula are beginning to emphasize the CCLS so that all students can have access to a rigorous instruction and high-level academic tasks.
- The school is beginning to utilize their resources aligned with the instructional goals towards improving instruction and increasing student engagement. (1.3)
  - The principal identified the need to increase resources and has purchased technology including SMART boards, laptops and iPads for instructional purposes, research, and participation in Lightsail, an on-line literacy academic intervention program. In addition, the school has allocated money for a part-time technician to set up a school media center, maintain the computers and troubleshoot any concerns. The school is initiating professional development with Rigor Relevance, to model lessons and increase rigor in English Language arts (ELA) instruction. This year the school is offering dual language French and is utilizing the French teacher to provide language instruction to seventh and eighth grade students as well. The principal has purchased materials to support all learners. Wilson Just Words program, a spelling and decoding program, is being used with English language learners and special education students. In addition, an afterschool program is provided to support English language learners in language acquisition. As a result, the school is on track to utilize the resources towards improving instruction and increasing student outcomes.
  - Structures are in place for teachers to meet weekly by department. In addition, a school based option affords teachers additional time to meet on

Friday afternoons for professional development, grade team meetings, and analyzing student work. This dedicated time enables teachers to work towards meeting the school's goals of increasing student achievement and elevating instructional practices. Teachers utilize the team meetings to align the curricula across grades, share best practices and discuss student progress. Teachers value the input from their colleagues. These designated times provide teachers the opportunity to improve instruction and engage students in challenging tasks.

- Majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations developing distributive leadership structures and increasing instructional capacity. (4.2)
  - Nearly all teachers meet weekly by department to engage in common planning and share instructional practices. During the English language arts team meeting, the teachers were reviewing a unit plan to identify commonalities across grades. Teachers stated that they often visit each other's class to follow up on suggestions. One teacher indicated that she visited her colleague to observe station teaching and another to take note of the discussion strategies. During the Special Education team meeting, teachers reviewed the lesson plan protocol for an integrated co-teaching (ICT) class, from the previous meeting, to ensure consideration for possible challenges and supports are addressed in the plan. The team then reviewed the procedures for approval and finalizing the individualized education plan (IEP). The principal sets guidelines on the expectations around the 4-week cycle for curriculum review, analysis of student work, examination of assessments, and sharing of strategies. Minutes and agendas are submitted. Teachers facilitate the meetings and take on leadership roles within the team structures. They communicate their ideas and concerns to the administration to have voice in key decision-making. As a result, the collaborative work is gradually leading to improved teacher practice and student learning.

## What the school needs to improve

- Develop instructional practices to ensure that all students have access to the curricula and are engaged in high level discussions and challenging tasks as evidenced by meaningful work products. (1.2)
  - Across classrooms, teachers are familiar with the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching with particular attention to engage students in learning through high-level questioning and discussion. Teachers have internalized the importance of increasing engagement by providing supports such as graphic organizers, partner discussions and visuals to ensure access to the instructional task. However, these practices were inconsistent throughout the school. In one class, the students were participating in a shared reading of the book *Dragonwings*. The teacher provided visual supports for the students to understand the time period and questioned the students on the gist but only a few students demonstrated their understanding through class participation. In another class, students are learning about World War I. The teacher provided visuals to better understand the content and then students worked in partnerships to read the text and answer questions. However, not all students were engaged or met the objective of the lesson. As a result, there is an uneven demonstration of all students being challenged through high-level questioning and tasks and therefore limiting production of meaningful work products.

- Further develop the school's culture through professional development and well-defined protocols to address all discipline and social-emotional concerns leading to students' academic and behavioral success. (1.4)
  - The principal identified building school culture and developing consistent systems to address the behavioral expectations as a priority. Through an assembly, students are made aware of the appropriate behaviors for classroom, hallway, and lunchroom. Color coded passes were instituted to track students' destination. Students understand that if in violation of the code of conduct, they receive lunch detention. A student council was established and their first decision was to select a panther as the school's mascot. Panther is an acronym for the character values: pride, achievement, non-violence, talented, helpful, efficient, responsible and successful. The book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, is being ordered for the student council to acquire leadership and peer mediation skills. Every month a character value is highlighted and emphasized through a bulletin board display and during morning announcements. Staff members develop a positive behavior intervention support (PBIS) committee however the team has yet to identify the incentives for the program to be fully instituted. Students state that some students are disrespectful and fighting is a problem but that there are consequences for the actions and the principal and teachers address the behaviors. Teachers express that the administration listens to their concerns and makes modifications to the protocols but there is a lack of follow-through. As a result of the schools developing structures around student social emotional support and inclusivity, the school culture does not yet reflect a safe environment that is conducive to student learning.
  - Structures are in place to support the social-emotional learning of all students. Students state that the staff encourages them to do well and is available to address their concerns. The school has a guidance counselor, social worker and a substance abuse prevention and intervention specialist (SAPIS) accessible but the principal indicated that more support is essential to meet student varying needs. Pupil personnel team meetings are held every week to discuss and track the progress of the students and develop strategies to better support the students in school as well as at home. The school implementation team (SIT) is utilized to ensure that the students' academic and behavioral needs are being addressed. Attendance is reviewed and the parent coordinator provides outreach to the families. Letters are sent home to address the excessive absences. The attendance teacher is working with the school to improve the attendance which is currently at 86%. There is little indication that the school's actions are positively impacting attendance. Teachers have participated in staff conferences about how to deescalate situations and how to speak to adolescents. A few staff members attended training on respect for all but teachers indicate the need for professional development in classroom management and strategies to promote effective behaviors. Although school systems to support students are developing there is little alignment between school initiatives and student learning needs resulting in inadequate guidance/ advisement supports for students.
- Ensure that teachers are utilizing results of common assessments to provide feedback to students and to adjust instruction to meet all students' learning needs. (2.2)
  - The school uses assessment data from STAR reading and mathematics, benchmark assessments, performance tasks and degrees of reading power (DRP) to identify student progress and areas of weakness. These assessments are primarily used to track growth and share with the parents

through Jupiter grades, the on-line grading system. Teachers are assessing student work with rubrics aligned with the state expectations primarily in English language arts. Students understand that the rubric clearly identifies the expectations and helps them to do better however only writing tasks are assessed using a rubric and comments provided students with limited feedback towards next steps. Teachers state that they use exit slips to assess and check for student understanding. In one class, the teacher asked students to turn in the problem as the exit slip but not all students had an opportunity to complete the activity limiting the teacher's ability to assess student content knowledge. In another class, students were informing the teacher that they did not understand the content of the lesson. The teacher assisted the students by pointing to the information on the handout and then continued to read the information from the power point as planned. In another class, students completed a response and then referred to a scoring rubric to self-reflect on their level of participation. Students turned to a peer to justify their self-participation grade but the teacher did not assess or determine the accuracy of the grade. As a result of limited feedback and inconsistent adjustments to instruction, student achievement is impeded and teachers are unable to meet all students' learning needs.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence	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

<b>UD</b> Underdeveloped	<b>D</b> Developing	<b>P</b> Proficient	<b>WD</b> Well Developed
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