

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**KAPPA IV**

**Middle School 302  
6 Edgecombe Avenue  
New York  
NY 10030**

**Principal: Dr. Juan Vives**

**Dates of review: October 28 – 29, 2013  
Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

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

### **Information about the school**

KAPPA IV is a middle school with 199 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 59% Black, 35% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% other and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.3%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school provides a nurturing environment where students receive academic and social-emotional support to help them succeed. (1.4)
  - Both students and parents state that the school is “safe” and that a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere permeates throughout the building. After a review of responses on the School Survey, the school community identified a need to foster more positive student behaviors. This led to a coordinated response to address student infractions, resulting in an improved school tone. During the parent meeting, participants stated that discipline “has gotten better” this school year. Students and parents appreciate that they can turn to teachers and the guidance counselor to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. Students stated that teachers provide academic help before and after the school day and that the principal readily addresses all concerns that are brought to his attention. Student government representatives (referred to as senators) meet weekly with the principal and provide advice/feedback on school policies and events. The vice president suggested a book club for selected students and the group is scheduled to soon begin meeting after school. Other students suggested spirit building activities such as crazy hat and twin days, in order to foster a positive school tone. Students also develop pride in giving back to their community. The group, Social Justice for Girls, comprised of sixteen students, helps name rescued dogs and helps the shelter select families to adopt dogs. On Saturdays, the students visit the shelter to help care for the animals. Other students support the Penny Harvest drive and provide service at soup kitchens during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Students’ active participation in shaping school wide decisions and commitment to service help support the development of leadership skills and bolster their self-esteem, as evidenced by classroom visits and conversations with students.
  - KAPPA IV staff members know individual students very well and have developed close confidential relationships with a number of students. The school’s partnership with Episcopal Social Services coordinates well with school based support structures, including the Columbia Presbyterian school clinic, to address the social-emotional and health needs of students and their families. Students who receive homework help and tutoring are demonstrating improved academic success in class, as evidenced by student notebooks and formative exams. Students also participate in after school enrichment activities such as dance and track and a STEM team is focused on designing an engineering game. Attendance team members target specific students when reviewing attendance data. The principal reviews a color coded attendance log which identifies specific students who are considered at risk. Noted trends result in interventions such as home visits and phone calls, and rewards such as assemblies and student recognition on bulletin boards. These targeted efforts resulted in the overall annual attendance growth to ninety one percent as well as a decrease in the number of tardy students.

- The school implements a standards based curriculum that emphasizes analytical thinking, leading to coherency across grades and content. (1.1)
  - School leaders and faculty adopted newly purchased common core curricula in English language arts and math. Teachers' lesson plans cite essential questions and teachers use the understanding by design backwards planning methodology format. In English language arts and social studies classrooms, teachers require students to refer to text in order to support their answers. In math, students are asked to explain their answers in writing and make real world connections in problem solving. In one sixth grade classroom, the teacher pressed students to identify if they had gathered enough convincing artifacts to support their argument/position. The instructional shifts were noted in the content of materials across content areas. This results in a unified curricula focus, leading to a coherent expectation to prepare students for the demands of high school and beyond.
  - During the English language arts and math department meetings teachers reviewed students' written responses to the performance tasks. Throughout the English language arts meeting the presenting teacher shared the use of graphic organizers, pre annotated the text and sought feedback to support struggling seventh grade students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. As a result, such scaffolds and supports ensure that students have access to the curricula so that they can complete grade level appropriate tasks.
  
- School leaders support teacher development through frequent observation and feedback cycles, with a focus on improving pedagogical practice throughout the school. (4.1)
  - The principal and assistant principal are currently conducting formal and informal classroom visits together, in order to further norm their understanding of the Danielson framework. A review of the observation calendar and logs provide evidence that they provide frequent, specific, and timely feedback to staff across competencies and components. An Advance talent coach visits the school and has provided professional development to staff and school administrators on the accuracy and meaningfulness of feedback. Administrators and teachers review student work products during team meetings and new teachers are mentored and also receive selected support as a specified team. The principal is beginning to use videos on ARIS Learn to support the school-wide focus on questioning and discussion techniques. At the beginning of the school year the principal met with teachers who self-assessed their needs. Based on teacher feedback, administrators continue to plan support aligned to areas for growth as well as individually determined professional goals. As a result, teachers continue to refine their pedagogical practices and exhibit an understanding of grade appropriate strategies that elicit basic student understanding.

## What the school needs to improve

- Improve instructional practices across classrooms to ensure that diverse students are consistently provided with multiple entry points and challenging tasks enabling them to demonstrate higher order thinking. (1.2)
  - Some teachers prepare lessons that target the specific needs and strengths of students and employ strategies that address a range of student ability levels. For example, in a sixth grade science class students studied the relationship between kinetic and potential energy and applied their theories to real world examples. Students worked in groups, with each student having a clearly assigned role such as equipment manager, recorder or assignment director. The teacher posed higher order questions to check for understanding, asked students to apply their learning to new situations and the students posed questions and comments to solidify their understanding. This however, is not the practice in every class. Therefore, not all students receive the academic support necessary to accelerate their learning. Additionally, although students sit in groups, teachers do not always use formative data to make these assignments to support struggling students or to develop appropriately challenging tasks to accelerate learning by high achievers. As such, some teachers do not yet implement lessons that allow for sufficient student engagement in higher order thinking. As a result, meaningful work products that demonstrate activities that stretch the thinking of all learners, including English language learners, students with individual education plans, and those performing at the highest achievement levels, are not yet evident in classrooms school wide.
  - Teachers are beginning to employ open-ended questions to spark discussions and students in some classrooms are questioning each other's assumptions and ideas. For example, in a social studies class students cited text to defend their answers and some built on each other's thoughts and ideas. However, this is not consistent. In many classrooms, questions and answers are most often between the teacher and an individual student. Consequently, thought-provoking questions and conversations that give students the chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds and use questions as a way to learn more, are not yet the norm across classrooms and grades.
- Ensure consistent use of on-going assessment practices and analysis of student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level. (2.2)
  - Teachers use common department and grade level baseline and performance assessments in core subjects. Unit tasks are given at the end of each unit and teachers display written tasks and student work on hallway bulletin boards. During planning meetings, teachers were recently trained to utilize protocols to analyze student work products. As evidenced in both the English language arts and math department meetings, teachers reviewed performance tasks and discussed the strengths and next steps in student work products. However, thus far, their approach is limited to identifying the needs of individual students.

Staff and administrators are in the process of establishing a school inquiry team which will identify and track the progress of a group of students in the lowest third. While some teachers track individual results, others do not yet systematically do so. Additionally, although teachers discuss students' next steps, they do not consistently discuss strategies to deliberately improve their own pedagogical skills. Consequently, all teachers are not consistently making needed changes to assigned tasks, student groupings, and their instructional practices, thus limiting the effectiveness of their instruction.

- Staff members were provided with professional development on higher level questioning to support student engagement and monitor student understanding. However, as noted in most classrooms, although teachers walk around the room to monitor groups and individual students at work and repeatedly ask questions, many do not take notes or strategically analyze student responses to check for understanding. Additionally, while some students use rubrics to self-monitor their work and are beginning to assess if their answers align with facts and make sense, this is not the norm across grades and departments. As a result, this hinders students' ability to make effective adjustments and some teachers do not provide ongoing feedback or make timely instructional adjustments so that students are able to master concepts and further their own learning.
- Streamline the alignment of resources and create a strategic plan that will improve classroom practice and student outcomes. (1.3)
  - The principal's budgeting, coupled with staff input, is beginning to result in the strategic use of resources aligned to the school's goals. The principal recently purchased books to enhance classroom libraries and there are varied opportunities for professional development and department/grade meetings. However, although smart boards are available, most teachers do not fully use this resource to enhance student understanding and many students do not use technology to publish their end-of-unit reports or projects. As such, research strategies aligned with project-based learning is not consistent across all classrooms, precluding students from producing higher level work.
  - The schedule allows for grade and department level teams to meet weekly. However, a review of minutes and agendas from the beginning of the school year indicate that some of the meetings lack a regular format and structure. Additionally, teams are not consistently receiving optimal support and are at the beginning stages of using protocols and professional literature to help guide the development of instructional activities. For example, the newly hired special education teachers and the English as a second language teacher are at the beginning stages of sharing best practices and strategies with their peers. This impedes optimal support to further accelerate the achievement and proficiency levels of English language learners and students with disabilities. Consequently, teaching practices are uneven and assignments do not engage all learners in rigorous academic tasks.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: KAPPA IV	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>