

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry**

**Middle School M328**

**401 West 164 Street  
Manhattan  
NY10032**

**Principal: Olga Quiles**

**Dates of review: Feb 6 - 7, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Elsa Nunez**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

M.S. 328 - Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry is a middle school with 292 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 11% Black, 87% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 39% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 68% of the students enrolled and girls account for 32%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 87.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal makes informed decisions regarding the use of time, funding and resources to support school goals to improve student outcomes. (1.3)
  - The school has made a concerted effort to support the school's English language learners as they progress in acquiring and mastering a second language. Title III funds are used to provide additional after-school programs for English language learners and students with interrupted instruction. The school's most at risk students are also provided with after-school tutorial services to strengthen areas in need of improvement. To support the school goal of improving literacy skills and to instill a life-long love of reading for all students, time for independent reading has been scheduled during the extended day program. Students have also been surveyed regarding their reading interests to purchase books that students can borrow from a basket located in the main office. In order to provide targeted, focused instruction to English language learners, class registers have been kept below contractual class size and the principal has eliminated multi-grade classes for English language learners. The most talented and skilled teachers have been programmed with the most at risk students in order to best support their academic and social needs. Teachers are provided with on-going professional development in literacy as a result of the school's collaboration with Teachers College. The school's schedule allows teacher teams to meet twice a week in grade level and content area teams to analyze student data and plan instructional units. Teacher teams follow an established protocol and are supported by members of the school's instructional team in order to develop plans that support school goals. Teacher teams plan interdisciplinary connections and real world application of concepts learned, resulting in trips to museums, universities and participation in debate teams in order to prepare students for college and careers. Members of the cabinet and instructional team are also enlisted to vet prospective candidates in order to assure that members that join school staff share the school's vision. The school's use of resources to support student and staff needs by developing tasks that require students to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in math and writing using evidence from sources, formulating opinions and arguments based on non-fiction topics in literacy, has fostered a common mission to improve student outcomes, as evidenced by student work products.
- The school's inclusive and nurturing environment supports the academic and social development of adults and students. (1.4)
  - Each grade has an advisor that monitors the academic, social and emotional progress of students to assure that students are on track to meet grade level goals. Grade level advisors meet weekly with guidance counselors and with teachers to discuss the social-emotional and academic needs of individual students in order to plan interventions. When issues arise that involve students in their cohort, grade advisors act as mediators to bring about resolution. If resolution is not possible or if students are involved in serious behavioral altercations, the school's dean gets involved to ensure that students understand the importance of adhering to the school's discipline policy. Students who receive suspensions due to infractions receive guidance support while serving their suspensions in an effort to remediate behavior. Two guidance counselors provide social-

emotional support during the day and during afterschool sessions to assure that all students' needs are properly addressed. Columbia Presbyterian hospital sponsors a mental health clinic at the school that provides counseling to the school's most at risk students. As a result of the school's efforts to address the academic and social-emotional needs of students, suspensions have decreased by more than fifty percent since the beginning of the school year.

- The school promotes the character traits of respect, responsibility and courage to develop student citizenship. During monthly town hall meetings, grade advisors focus on age-appropriate social development topics such as bullying, change, multicultural awareness as well as character traits highlighted by the school to encourage the social well being of students. Morning meetings during homeroom, provide an opportunity for teachers to reinforce topics highlighted during town hall meetings by having students read articles, watch videos and engage in discussions. Guidance counselors provide on-going support to staff in order to develop strategies to address challenging student behaviors. The school offers student clubs such as basketball, mouse squad soccer, cheer leading and chess to provide students with opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities. Families are kept informed of school programs and support opportunities through the school's messenger system and newsletters. Families are also supported through workshops on such topics as the requirements of state testing, Common Core Learning Standards, English as a second language and nutrition classes to enable parents to support students at home. Parents are also an integral part of scheduled assembly programs to celebrate the academic and social achievements of students. Consequently, parents indicate that they are committed to ensuring that the school continues to provide students with additional academic and social-emotional support by volunteering to support programs such as the Mouse Squad, Saturday Academy and school garden project.
- Data driven goals have been established and are evident across planning documents to drive school improvement. (3.1)
  - The school has developed goals to improve student performance on New York State English Language arts and New York State Language Assessment Test for English language learners in order to plan targeted support. A priority for the principal this school year is the effective implementation of the new teacher evaluation system in order to improve teacher practice. Members of the school's School Leadership Team and instructional cabinet analyzed student achievement trends and citywide instructional expectations to develop goals to accelerate student achievement. As a result of data analysis, the school developed goals to improve the use of assessment during instruction, improve questioning techniques and improve the use of data to develop lesson plans based on student needs. These goals are incorporated into the schools professional development plan and the Comprehensive Education Plan to assure resources are targeted to support goals. Interviews with staff and a review of the School Survey indicate that clearly communicated plans for school improvement have resulted in improved morale and staff collaboration.
  - Goals developed by the schools leadership team and the instructional cabinet grew out of a thorough review of school-wide data. The principal shares instructional expectations with staff during faculty conferences, teacher team meetings and in writing to assure that teachers align lesson to expectations. All minutes resulting from school meetings are posted on

Google Docs, an online site to share information, in order to promote awareness and input by school staff. Students develop personalized goals after meeting individually with content area teachers to develop action plans for improvement. During school-wide town hall meetings, the core values and academic expectations for the school year are communicated to students. Instructional expectations are also communicated to students through newsletters and parent workshops. Consequently, parents and students believe that the school adequately prepares students for college and careers, as shared during student and parent interviews.

## What the school needs to improve

- Increase the rigor and coherence of the school's curriculum to assure that students are adequately challenged and supported in meeting grade level standards. (1.1)
  - The school uses the Teachers College units for reading and writing and Connected Mathematics Project 3 for math. The principal engages staff in professional development to support planning of rigorous tasks that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, push students' thinking and are accessible to all students to elevate engagement. In literacy, teachers plan tasks that require students to use specific evidence from texts to support responses, thereby resulting in student work that is aligned to standards. There is also a school-wide focus on explicitly teaching content area vocabulary to support English language learners. Teacher teams use a specific protocol to review student work in order to adjust curricular units to meet the needs of students. However, lessons observed demonstrated that the tasks implemented in the classrooms are vague and correlation to grade level standards is not always evident. In addition, tasks are not modified to meet specific needs of students. Teachers use the Depth of Knowledge framework to develop tasks at varying levels of complexity to challenge all students. However, in the majority lessons, tasks implemented and questions were generally lower level, and as a result students do not have a clear understanding of the lesson objectives and are not cognitively engaged.
- Further develop teacher pedagogy to assure that students are provided with a variety of entry points to the school's curriculum in order to increase engagement and higher order thinking. (1.2)
  - The principal believes that students learn best when provided with opportunities to share thinking with peers, formulate questions and explore content through hands-on activities. Professional development efforts focus on developing coherent lessons, aligned to the citywide instructional shifts and planning of higher-order questions that promote student discussion and student engagement. Teachers have also aligned lesson plans to the Danielson Framework in an effort to promote coherent instructional strategies across classrooms. Teachers indicate that they incorporate the use of manipulatives, graphic organizers, mixed ability groups and differentiated tasks into lesson plans to provide subgroup of students with a variety of scaffolds. Although students are grouped to work collaboratively, tasks provided to students are not differentiated or scaffolded to support specific student needs. Charts and word walls are displayed in classrooms memorializing content taught. However, charts are posted high on walls and rarely referenced by teachers during

classroom instruction. Consequently, there are missed opportunities for students to use classroom resources to support their learning.

- Strengthen the use of formative and summative assessments by individual teachers and teacher teams in order to adjust curricular and instructional decisions. (2.2)
  - In addition to results of summative assessments, the school compares beginning of the year benchmark assessments in all content areas with mid-year assessments to identify instructional priorities for the general school population and subgroups of students. Teacher teams review results of item skills analysis for subgroups of students to plan instructional strategies. Teachers shared that they use exit slips, student work, observations and reflection exercises to assess student mastery of key concepts. Furthermore, the principal frequently generates reports from regarding student assignments and grades posted on Datacation by teachers to assess student progress. Posted across classrooms is the school's grading policy, delineating categories such as participation, quizzes, homework and projects to assess student progress. However, interviews with students demonstrate that other access to grades on Pupil Path, the school's online reporting system, they could not cite other sources of data used to inform of academic standing. School policy requires teachers to assess student work using grade-appropriate rubrics and provide feedback that enables students to improve work products. The principal shared that teachers and consultants decide which rubrics to use prior to the commencement of units of study to establish clear expectations for end of unit outcomes. However, review of student work demonstrates that feedback provided to students is not specific, actionable or connected to rubrics used to assess work. As a result, students do not have a clear understanding of how their work is scored nor how to improve work products.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

<b>School name: M.S. 328 - Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		X		
<b>Instructional Core</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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> Underdeveloped	<b>D</b> Developing	<b>P</b> Proficient	<b>WD</b> Well Developed	