

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

New Design Middle School

Middle School 514

**625 West 133rd Street
New York
NY 10027**

Principal: Francesca Pisa

Dates of review: April 8 – 9, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

New Design Middle School is a middle school with 306 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 61% Black, 34% Hispanic, 3% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 32% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Analysis of a variety of student performance data provides administrators with a view of students' strengths and weaknesses and results in curricular interventions to positively impact school performance. (2.2)
 - To fully comprehend data results, teachers conduct item skills analysis of math and English language arts state assessment data so that they can design lessons to help close the gap for noted skills that students are lacking. One teacher's written notes indicate that a specific student benefits from conferring around text close to her grade level, as well as from listening to read-alouds from text significantly higher than her reading level, while another student learns best when given models and requires simplified directions and graphic organizers to support conceptual understanding and comprehension. Teachers share such information with students during individual conferences. As such, teachers are aware of students' needs and students are becoming cognizant of the connections between tasks and the expectations espoused by the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers use assorted streams of data from varied sources, including Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) assessments, end of unit essays, unit tests, conference notes, rubric scores, and teacher prepared tests, as well as design their own writing and math benchmark assessments, aligned to standards to gauge students' understanding of the taught curricula. Several teachers annotate essays and utilize rubrics to provide specific written feedback on students' work, noting students' strengths and next steps. Consequently, teachers are demonstrating ways of understanding and sharing feedback on students' assessment results relative to select standards, with the focus on increased student outcomes, as noted in the online assessment system.
 - Foundation assessments, created by teachers at varied grade levels, are given to all students three times annually. All teachers review the results from these Common Core aligned assessments and disaggregate the data to note specific strengths and establish targeted goals for individual students. Additionally, the principal requests reflective written feedback for specific groups of students, such as students with individual education plans, and students who outperform or underperform teachers' expectations, with specific attention to analysis of gender specific data for English language learners and other demographic data. The principal also reviews comparative data across grades and content areas to note which teachers impact students' progress from Foundation assessments I and II, and will repeat this process when the third assessment is given in June. She then follows up with individual conversations with each teacher to focus next steps. Department level teams also create common performance tasks and baseline assessments which are used to identify strengths and needs, as well as promote ongoing conversations and reflections. The principal and teachers use these results, including student work products, to measure student progress toward specific goals and to make needed changes to the curricula, integrating strategies such as requiring students to cite specific evidence to support their claims, both

verbally and in writing. This leads to teachers reviewing results and formulating specific action plans to address individual students' needs through data driven adjustments to curriculum and instruction.

- The principal makes thoughtful organizational decisions around teacher selection and assignments, in alignment with school goals, to support improved student achievement. (1.3)
 - Computer lap top carts for every grade, Smart boards in all classrooms, lap tops, calculators and other instructional technology equipment are in full use across grades and subjects. Teachers receive ongoing training on the integration of instructional technology to support their daily learning objectives. School administrators conduct written communication with staff using google docs and students publish much of their work online. The principal provides these resources in order to ensure that staff and students are able to meet the established instructional goals which are focused on the following: grade level access to English language arts and math Common Core curricula, leading to improved student outcomes, increased pedagogic development and improved school culture. Teachers participate in study groups and strategic use of consultants from City Science, LitLife, and Community Immunity, as well as network staff, ensures that all faculty members receive professional development support geared to their instructional needs. The principal expects teachers to deepen their instructional knowledge aligned to their area of specialty so that they can master the content demands for the specific grade. As a result, teachers' instructional capacity is growing and student learning is enhanced and solidified, as evidenced by student work products displayed on classroom and hallway bulletin boards.
 - As a relatively new school in its third year, the school was able to hire prospective new teachers, using the 18D process. This process requires the involvement of representatives from the varied collective bargaining units as well as administrative staff. Thus recent hires participated in group interviews and were asked to provide unit curricula as well as model lessons, prior to being selected. To reinforce specific literacy skills, the staff established reading clubs during the extended day timeframe, focusing on developing independent reading strategies, while building students' stamina and fostering a love of reading. Groups were homogeneously redesigned, resulting in more targeted afterschool assistance. Tracking logs reflect that all students, especially those in the sixth grade, are reading more frequently and for longer periods of time. Additionally, the principal deliberately assigns heterogeneously mixed ability groups of students to Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) classes to foster deep thinking in all classes. After a review of data revealed disciplinary concerns, the principal hired three Design for Life coordinators who are licensed special education teachers. These staff members facilitate conversations during their advisory classes in order to help foster positive coping mechanisms. An observed conversation with a seventh grade class revealed students sharing personal experiences about peer pressure, while the teacher skillfully questioned them and elicited strategies regarding coping mechanisms they use when they feel pressed to engage in actions which will result in negative consequences. Each content department now has a special educator participating in department team meetings. These practices are all conducive to optimal levels of personal and academic success for students.

- Effective systems and partnerships support students and families via learning opportunities that place a high priority on improving student outcomes. (1.4)
 - The school's extended day program, coordinated by Citizen's School, ensures that sixth grade students participate in a longer school day, with access to homework assistance, sports, arts, apprenticeship clubs and other enrichment activities three days weekly. Partnerships with New York University which provides additional counseling supports via social work interns, Community of Unity whose personnel meet weekly with a male gender specific group of students to develop their leadership skills and Columbia University whose graduate students engage eighth grade students in project based learning, coordinate well with other school-based structures that address the social-emotional and academic needs of students and their families. Design for Life teachers coordinate the advisory curriculum and work closely with the guidance counselor and Director of School Culture to support discipline, mentor students, strategically link parents with specific agencies and services as needed, and foster a positive school culture. Students who are tutored are demonstrating better academic success than others in their class, as evidenced by their increased reading proficiency levels on running records. A strong partnership with Computers for Youth offers families free computers for use at home and students are taught how to conduct research online, as they explore their high school options. Additionally, school faculty members conduct workshops for families so that they understand how to use JumpRope, the school's online assessment information system. Tools for Teaching, a study group for teachers, enables staff to foster a deeper understanding of the stages of adolescent development. This provides teachers with coping mechanisms when dealing with challenging behaviors and helps them build strong relationships with students. In the large student group meeting, students shared that school staff members know them individually, are readily available and "always listen to their problems." One student stated that teachers "work hard" and provide them with "good" advice because they "want them to have a future." Additionally, attendance team members review attendance data on a weekly basis. Noted trends result in interventions such a home visits or rewards at the monthly grade level "gatherings." These targeted structures and systems align with student needs, resulting in improved academic and personal student growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the alignment between teacher practice and the school's beliefs about student learning, to ensure high levels of engagement and thinking so that all students reach their full potential. (1.2)
 - The principal operates with a core belief that students learn by doing and must also know "how to learn" i.e. develop metacognition strategies and know and understand their learning style. Teachers are beginning to demonstrate understanding of the citywide instructional shifts and select components of the Danielson Framework for teaching. As such, they are expected to model and explain what they are doing, while providing a safe place for students to struggle to solve complex tasks. To align their practices with the Framework, the school's belief system and students'

needs, teachers use scaffolding tools such as graphic organizers to support students with writing and manipulatives to support math understanding. Some teachers, however, are at the embryonic stages of meeting these expectations. For example, in one eighth grade English language arts class, the teachers modeled their thinking aloud and asked higher order questions but did not allow the students to uncover the answers. Instead, the teachers provided the answers to their own questions. As such, students did not productively struggle with complex text. Further, some teachers' plans miss out on demonstrating strategies to sufficiently engage students in higher order thinking, through work products and activities that are cognitively demanding of all learners, especially those performing at the highest achievement levels.

- 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, the objective of one English language arts class was geared so that students could understand how the setting of the story can impact the central themes in the text. The teacher continually asked probing questions and students shared responses and engaged in a conversation demonstrating a deep understanding of the story. However, in some classrooms, questions and answers still remain between teacher and individual student. Consequently, thought-provoking questions, conversations that give students the chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds, and use questions as a way to further their learning, are not yet the norm across classes and grades. This results in uneven levels of student thinking and participation across classrooms.
- Expand the process of refining the alignment of curricula to standards across all grades and content areas in order to build coherence and emphasize rigorous skills to prepare students for the next level. (1.1)
 - The principal supports teachers with the new math curriculum with a focus on problem solving and conceptual understanding, in alignment to the instructional shifts in mathematics. Teachers are also making adjustments to the English language arts curriculum in order to further align writing tasks to the reading units of study. However, these practices are not yet evident across all grades and subjects. Although, there is evidence of social studies and science units across grades, at times tasks are not rigorous or challenging. In these content areas, units do not show students frequently immersed in tasks involving multiple texts and tasks are not well aligned to lesson objectives or unit essential questions. In one science lesson plan, for the upcoming science fair, students were required to work in groups on lap tops, researching varied projects, including, "*How does the amount of sea crystals change the growth rate of rock candy?*" Conversely, on hallway bulletin boards, student work products in the same content area demonstrated low level tasks and did not require students to think deeply. Additionally, in a student's work folder, the social studies task required students to write one fact about a specific god or goddess. This demonstrates that, at times, tasks lack rigor and alignment to standards and student work products do not always demonstrate high level thinking skills. As such, performance based tasks that probe for deep understanding and application of learning do not extend across all content areas, thus precluding students from achieving at even higher levels than they currently attain.

- Further build upon the teacher observation and feedback process to ensure closer alignment to the Danielson Framework for Teaching in order to elevate teaching practices. (4.1)
 - At the beginning of the school year the principal and assistant principal developed the observation schedule for the school. Individual planning conferences were held and each teacher developed three professional goals. For example, one teacher's goal is to ensure that the pacing of the lessons fully engages students so that they learn at their greatest potential. The principal conducts formal and informal observations with the new assistant principal to ensure that their practices are normed and aligned to the Danielson Framework. The administrators provide immediate verbal feedback which is beginning to support teachers' growth. However, they do not consistently provide teachers with written feedback that is aligned to the Framework. Additionally, next steps are not consistently actionable, nor is feedback consistently effective for all teachers, as it does not always cite evidence from student work or other data sets. This results in missed opportunities to help individual teachers achieve optimal levels of performance to accelerate teacher growth and improve student outcomes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: New Design Middle 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	