



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and
Social Change**

Secondary School 670

**200-214 WEST 135th STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10030**

Principal: SEAN DAVENPORT

**Dates of review: March 19 - 20, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change is a middle-high school with 572 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 77% Black, 21% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 14% 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 93.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Across grades and content areas, curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and designed to address students' needs so that all students have access to cognitively engaging learning activities. (1.1)
 - Administrators and teachers have spent considerable time over the past two years, including summer planning time, to review and revise curriculum in all content areas and align units of study to the expectations of the CCLS. Teachers utilize the Tri-state Rubric, as a tool to define criteria for exemplary CCLS lessons. Units of study are based on key areas such as focus on text-based evidence in discussions and writing, use of academic vocabulary, and writing from sources to explain, inform, or argue perspectives. Furthermore, yearlong plans and units of study reflect alignment to these CCLS criteria. Academic tasks and lessons reviewed reflect consistent planning of essential questions, discussion prompts, and rationale for relevance of content for future learning. Amendments to learning targets, resources, and strategies based on students' identified needs, are evidenced in notations made by teachers, including variety in texts, adding time to length of unit, and providing exemplars for writing tasks. The principal and teachers concur that curricula are a set of live documents that are revised frequently to address the needs of students. For example an analysis of data including student writing across grades, State assessments, and previous feedback to the school based on a prior Quality Review, prompted the leadership to prioritize writing and academic language as a focus for all grades and content areas. The amendments made in the current English language arts (ELA) curriculum include the use of Word Gen, a program for building vocabulary used by grades 6 to 8 students. Strategies in the program, which help students develop intentional focus on the use of academic language in their writing, are shared with teachers in the upper grades to address the school wide need. Advancement of learning for middle school students is embedded in the process, which now targets eighth grade students for Algebra and Living Environment exposing a growing number of students to accelerated coursework and preparing them for secondary level work and assessments such as the Regents' exams. As a result of this focused work around the alignment of curriculum, revisions to support students' learning needs, and course offerings for accelerated academic coursework, the school is advancing diverse learners to meet the expectations of the CCLS and prepare them for post-secondary work.
- The administration and staff embrace a positive, safe learning culture where the academic and personal growth of students is prioritized in preparation for college and career. (1.4)
 - The principal and faculty work together to ensure that Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) students receive the support and resources they need in order to compete and succeed beyond graduation. The focus on college and career readiness is embraced by the students interviewed, as they speak clearly of their future goals and how their teachers hold them accountable for conducting themselves with excellence in speech and that their academic work reflects post-secondary expectations. Middle school teachers are selected by the principal based on content expertise and to ensure that students are exposed to a gradual introduction of higher-level

coursework in math and science. One student said she appreciates that teachers give frequent and targeted feedback that allows her to revise her work and improve oral presentation skills because “these skills will help her in high school and college”. Additionally, students across grades state they feel safe and known well by the staff. This was especially expressed by students who have been in the school since the lower grades, housed in the same building as TMA. This family atmosphere, according to staff, parents, and teachers interviewed, contributes to an environment where conflicts and incidents have been significantly lowered over the past several years and the learning environment is focused on student improvement and achievement. In order for teachers to support students’ development of personal and academic behaviors, teachers are provided professional development in areas of classroom management, cultural responsiveness, and ongoing support from guidance counselors who push-in to classrooms to work alongside teachers. Additionally, the school’s partnerships with community organizations, the local church, and colleges such as Smith College, provide guidance, information and technical support for students applying for college, seeking internships, and references for financial scholarships. Another initiative, Brothers on a New Direction (BOND) provides mentoring for male students holding them to high expectations for academic and personal success. Parents are more than satisfied with the school’s administration and faculty and find them to be helpful and supportive in all areas of their children’s lives. The Grandmother’s Club started as an initiative for parent engagement, enables an “extended family” approach as students are welcomed warmly in the morning by a ‘surrogate grandma’ that reminds them that the community bands together on their behalf. As a result of this nurturing climate and structures to support student learning and personal development, students are adopting effective academic and personal behaviors.

- Across the school, teachers and teacher teams analyze student work and use data from various assessments to illuminate student strengths and needs and make instructional adjustments to meet the needs of diverse learners. (2.2)
 - A review of inquiry team information across grades and content areas revealed that teachers routinely analyze data from various sources, including common assessments results from weekly middle school Word Generation writing exercises, Degrees of Reading Power, and tasks for units of study in upper grades. Teachers also use feedback from observations of student work and peer reflections to adjust instruction. Teacher teams observed use protocols for looking at student work, identifying strengths and gaps and potential instructional strategies to address learning needs of students. For example, the Middle School Quality Initiative team focused their time on determining whether a particular scaffold, a graphic organizer designed to help student distinguish a claim from evidence to support the claim, could be removed from the task. The goal was for students to be more independent in their writing by developing strategies to self-regulate how they organized their written responses. Additionally, teachers discussed how they might use the mini-lesson to model strategies for helping students and how these strategies could be shared across teachers and content classrooms for continuity. The BOND team, formed by male teachers to work closely with a select group of students, spoke of academic progress monitoring with a focus on understanding the barriers that impact some of their students’ growth. During their observed meeting, teachers strategized about specific ways to closely follow-up with students at risk for not meeting standards. This approach is then shared with the principal and other key members of the staff, including guidance counselors, classroom teachers, and families, so

that students are supported in their learning as well as knowing how to address any particular adjustments necessary to meet their identified needs. These school wide practices of regularly assessing student progress and then systematically analyzing student data provides teachers and school leaders with useful information to make effective adjustments to instruction and curriculum.

- Teachers lead and collaborate effectively on grade level and content area teams to make key decisions that influence how students learn across the school. (4.2)
 - Across grades and content areas, inclusive of key staff members such as guidance counselors, social worker, and dean, teachers meet weekly to assess student work, plan learning activities within units of study, and discuss student progress. In addition, faculty and administration attend weekly Friday meetings, after school, during which teachers discuss key findings from their inquiry work, share strategies and best practices, and build coherence between middle school and high school practices and expectations to ensure continuity throughout the school. Teachers appreciate this extended time to work together with colleagues. A main focus of professional collaborations is ensuring that student work is reflective of the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards specifically around student use of academic language, and providing evidence for their claims. Furthermore, grade-level leaders and content area teachers use team meetings to make decisions that are then proposed to the principal for school wide initiatives. For example, teachers are currently proposing an adjustment to the schedule to allow for strategic reading time to support accelerated learners as well as struggling readers. Teachers schedule visits to one another's classrooms, provide instructional materials and documents for one another, and give each other feedback on strategies and interventions they are implementing in their classrooms. As a result, teacher leadership and capacity is being strengthened school wide as teachers collaborate on a regular basis and contribute to key decisions that affect student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase consistency of teaching practices across grades and subjects so that lessons reflect the school's beliefs about learning to include questions and discussions that require students to engage in higher order thinking. (1.2)
 - The principal and teachers articulate the belief that students learn best through engagement in rigorous content and skill development, rich discussion that requires them to reflect on and analyze new concepts, and demonstration of their thinking through writing about their learning. These elements are present in most classrooms to varying degrees. For example, in one lesson, students were asked to solve trigonometric functions by working in groups and giving one another feedback in the process of solving for specific values. In another class students read scenes from Hamlet, determined roles, character motives and expression, and presented excerpts from the script to the class. In a literacy classroom, students analyzed peer drafts of essays developed within a unit of study designed to explore the effects of war on people and communities. Students in all classrooms were engaged in directed tasks and responded to discussion prompts by the teacher. In some classrooms discussions were amongst students. However, as a result of teacher directed lessons in several lessons observed and repetition of instructions for tasks, time for student discovery of new concepts was limited.

Additionally the low level of questions across some classrooms leads to inconsistent engagement in higher-level discussion and reflects uneven levels of participation, thus hindering the acceleration of learning for students.

- Refine systems for evaluating the effectiveness of curricular and instructional adjustments and professional development practices so that school wide initiatives effectively promote school improvement efforts and student mastery. (5.1)
 - The faculty and administrators, including lead teachers and key support staff, meet frequently to make decisions about changes to curriculum, instructional strategies, and resources, to support teacher development. As a result, there are many amendments to units of study to reflect the findings about gaps in student learning. For example, some units of study have been extended extra time and others have been revised to reflect the use of particular scaffolds to ensure students develop language skills and vocabulary use in their writing. Additional school wide initiatives such as a “Two-Tier “ professional development plan have also been added to the school wide plan based on the need to build teacher capacity in implementing instructional shifts reflecting the expectations of CCLS as well as training for teachers to respond to adolescent developmental and cultural needs of students. This thoughtful planning with overall school improvement in mind has set the stage for moving teacher practice and improving student achievement. However, there is not yet a defined system for evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts with clear indicators of impact on school improvement as measured by student success. Thus, this limits the school’s ability to increase coherence of practices and policies to support student mastery of the expectations of the CCLS.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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

To what extent does the school...	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

To what extent does the school...	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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