



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Collaborative Arts Middle School

**Middle School Q355
145-00 Springfield Blvd
Queens
NY 11413**

Principal: Tammy N. Holloway

Dates of review: January 7 – 8, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Lenon C. Murray

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Collaborative Arts Middle School is a middle school with 456 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 92% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The curriculum offers multiple opportunities for students to engage in rigorous academic tasks to produce meaningful work products. (1.1)
 - School leaders reviewed the Citywide Instructional Expectations and thoroughly analyzed school data before selecting appropriate materials to integrate the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). English language arts and social studies are blended because the school has a strong humanities focus. Non-fiction and historical fiction texts are both utilized to teach close reading. The teacher teams take great care in text selection to facilitate analysis and deep thinking. Unit and lesson plans include layered texts that facilitate ongoing study are preferred over simpler grade level texts with single themes. The school provides multiple sources to support comparative studies and implicit evidence. Students are able to determine the main topic of a multi-paragraph text as well as unpacking specific paragraphs within the text. Both the web-based texts and the purchased texts support these criteria. Expeditionary Learning is the main source of available material. In addition, teachers emphasize academic vocabulary which has been identified as a growth for the majority of students. As a result, student writing is supplemented and supported in the curricula framework.
 - In addition to the careful selection of materials, the school uses the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) framework to consistently evaluate the rigor of available academic tasks. Teacher teams examine student work to better plan and design learning activities with a focus on the needs of English language learners and special education students. When the tasks are at DOK level three or above, they provide supports to engage all students in the tasks. Supports include, but are not limited to graphic organizers, technology (laptops and Smart boards), manipulatives, checklists and guided reading. The administration works with teachers to ensure that the curricula implementation includes whole group, small flexible groups, independent work and tutoring activities. As a result, academic tasks demonstrate rigorous habits and higher-order skills as evidenced during classroom visits and student interviews. For example, one grade 8 student was proud to explain why his highly-graded written assignment, a biographical research exercise with a defined rubric, was both a challenging and rewarding project to complete.
- School leaders make strategic organizational decisions that facilitate teacher collaboration to support the school's instructional goals and improve student learning outcomes. (1.3)
 - The school leader has made a concerted effort to direct all available resources towards school goals. These include that sixty percent of students will participate in coherent evidence-based academic discussions. Another goal is that 60% of instructional staff will improve from "developing" to "effective" in questioning and discussion. A third goal is to increase the parent participation at educational events. There is a Smart board in use in every classroom, students use the computer lab

daily while iPad and laptop carts are available for students to research and utilize tutorials aligned to reading levels. The school community uses Skedula, DataCation, Edmodo and Google Docs to store and access information seamlessly while facilitating dialogue among stakeholders. The school has hired an additional assistant principal with primary responsibility for school culture, tone and management. He has a dean and two associate deans, both of whom are experienced school aides, who report to him. The school takes a large interest in the social-emotional well being of students and enhancing their capacity for growth. The school has partnered with Turnaround for Children, which provides extensive training for teachers in the use of cooperative learning structures and effective behavior management practices for classroom use. As a result, students are producing projects and papers of increasing quality as measured by rubrics in use since last school year.

- Teacher teams meet at least twice weekly on a regular schedule built into the school day. The school is organized into two cohorts, which facilitates parallel programming and smaller teacher-student ratios in all the core subject areas. Students are programmed into the four major studios of visual arts, theatre, dance and chorus. Teaching is organized into humanities and science, math and the performing arts. This arrangement supports the theme of the school and its commitment to the vision of academic improvement through the humanities. Special education students meet in self-contained settings, integrated settings and academic intervention groups, and they receive at least one extra period of academic work each week. These structures have resulted in improved instruction as demonstrated in the baseline results of the special education students and English language learners as compared to the past school year.
- Teacher teams consistently use uniform, standards-based rubrics and assessments and effectively analyze student work, leading to improved instructional decisions and learning for students. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams and administrators have developed cohesive rubrics within the school that provide an accurate portrait of where students fall within the standards. These rubrics are supplemented by the assessments embedded within each unit of study in the English language arts and math materials purchased by the school, Expeditionary learning and Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3). Students have themselves become adept at using rubrics along with self-assessment checklists to determine where they are along the scope and sequence of their curriculum and are thereby enabled to set and achieve realistic goals. Benchmark testing is also built into the year-long curricula and tied to measures of student learning for the entire school. Teachers provide feedback both verbally and in writing, with post-it notes and annotations that celebrate student strengths and provide clear next steps towards mastery of the standards. These defined practices create a consistent lens around standards-based work and provide meaningful information that students can use immediately to improve their performance. This has led to an enhanced student ability to make their mathematical thinking visible as evidenced in student math reflections and exit slips.
 - Teachers use a workshop model of teaching generally across classrooms. They devise formative assessments that emerge from

strategy lessons with small groups of students and individual consultations during academic intervention. For example, special education students in sixth grade were found to struggle with math word problems. The school responded by increasing their block instructional time. During common planning and inquiry time, teachers measure student work against the standards and make modifications to the lessons to reverse weak trends and develop student deficiencies. As a result, teachers are better able to target groups of students who need supports and extensions as evidenced by more than 70% of students showing some improvement from the first unit assessment to the next.

- The school's supervisory processes are based on regular standards-based observations and student work analyses that provide teachers with feedback to stimulate improvements in practice. (4.1)
 - The school is fully committed to the maximum utilization of the Danielson Framework for teaching. The principal conducted initial planning conferences with the entire staff at the beginning of the school year where teachers voluntarily engaged in self-assessment and shared their professional goals with school leaders. The Teacher Effectiveness coach from the network works with the staff to norm expectations and unpack the Danielson Rubric. Teachers' strengths and areas for growth are defined by the four point scale from the Danielson Framework. Ongoing professional development enables teachers to use the feedback immediately in their classrooms. At post-observation sessions, the administrators use low-inference evidence to facilitate productive discussions. This systematic feedback, including next steps, has resulted in teacher growth as measured by sequential observation reports in teachers' files.
 - The administrators have divided the frequent cycles of observations among them to make the number of observations per administrator more manageable. The principal meets individually with the newer teachers during the year to monitor expectations, discuss goals and provide next steps for their improvement. For example, a sixth grade teacher with excellent content knowledge was working on her classroom management in order to retain the students' attention more effectively throughout the lesson. Teachers have been trained to access the ARIS Learn community, EngageNY and the Common Core library. Each new teacher has a mentor assigned to them and are provided with support in lesson planning. Inter-visitations are a routine method of sharing best practices. The first two years of the school's existence provided challenges with finding teachers who were sufficiently committed to improvement to ensure their retention. This has resulted in improved teacher practices as measured by improved retention rates.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance teacher pedagogy that enables diverse learners to freely access curriculum in multiple ways in order to engage them in high-level discussions and produce meaningful work. (1.2)

- The staff is focused on incorporating the beliefs and tenets of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. There are common practices such as students being organized into collaborative groups and Smart Board technology being used to increase student engagement and attention. Teachers share effective ways to integrate high level questioning and generate student discussion during their lessons. Tasks are modified and structured to include English language learners and special education students in active participation. This approach is intended to improve evidence-based writing. The school believes in student explanations and reflection. In a sixth grade literacy class, students were required to respond in writing in different ways to the text under consideration based on their Lexile levels. However, some teachers allow struggling students, including special education students, to wrestle with challenging material with some coaching. As a result, their contributions to class discussion require additional elaboration, leading to a wider range in quality of work products and opportunities for academic growth.
- Increase systems of communication to more effectively engage students and adults in a culture of mutual respect to improve student learning. (1.4)
 - The school has hired an additional assistant principal who supervises a dean and associate deans who monitor the hallways and public meeting areas of the school. In their homerooms students are well known by their teachers in cohorts and the guidance counselor knows all the students at the school. Students are addressed by their names when they approach adults for assistance. Monthly town hall meetings are held by grade at which students can freely express their concerns. Each student is assigned an advisor who conducts a weekly advisory class. This person provides coaching in organization and personal goal-setting. A token economy is maintained at the school that rewards students with privileges and prizes weekly for positive behavior. However, students reported on the School Survey that they do not feel respected by their teachers or their peers and the persistence of this perception delayed the personal growth of some students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Collaborative Arts 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