



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School**

**31R064**

**100 Essex Drive  
Staten Island  
NY 10314**

**Principal: Traci Frey**

**Dates of review: February 25 – 26, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Safiyah Satterwhite**

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

### **Information about the school**

Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School is a high school with 467 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 13% Black, 17% Hispanic, 52% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 23% 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 90%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders work with the school community and various constituents to establish clear and targeted school-level goals that are tracked and support student socio-emotional growth and learning. (3.1)
  - Together with the school community, during the spring semester of the preceding year, Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School invites Expeditionary Learning (EL) experts to conduct an EL implementation plan assessment which is used as a foundation to develop the school's work plan. The work plan is a document that is comprised of school-wide goals, the rationale for such, the alignment with EL Core practices, alignment with New York City Department of Education measures, Faculty Learning Targets, Structures and Leadership Actions, EL Support and Services and Data Points/ Evidence for Monitoring and Progress. This plan is a result of the reflective work conducted by school faculty, parents and students that serve on the leadership team and is used to guide the work of the school for the upcoming year. Since many of the school goals are directly related to student learning and socio-emotional growth, the school comes together mid-year for a "mid-year huddle" to discuss what is working well, how do they know, what is the impact and how do they capitalize on what's working? This cycle prompts a revision of goals that refocuses the school on various areas in need relative to their work plan. This process, with a focus on student work and development, fosters student achievement for all learners.
- School leaders use frequent cycles of observations and actionable feedback to communicate expectations that promote teacher growth. (4.1)
  - The school principal and assistant principal conduct frequent teacher evaluations supported by the Advance system and aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Based on the school work plan, an area of focus this year is Component 3b: using questioning and discussion techniques. Teachers throughout the school have selected a variety of methods of evaluative support and have testified that they feel supported and receive clear feedback about their instructional practice consistently. School leaders have divided the teaching staff by content area expertise and use this reduced load to provide more frequent, specific and actionable feedback to support teacher growth. For example, in one evaluation the principal noted to a teacher, "Balance the recall questions with more evidence-based questions on both the note-catcher and the ones that you asked during the short discussion breaks when you stopped the film. In this way, you can more easily assess if students are making the appropriate connections to meet the learning target." Furthermore to support teacher reflection teachers are administered memorandums from the principal in an ongoing basis regarding scholarship data and student work. These memos aid in requiring teachers to reflect on the performance of their students and require teachers to develop very specific plans to support student achievement. These school-wide observation protocols with a focus on student data and clear next steps that articulate expectations for instructional practice result in improved teacher development.

- Across classrooms teaching strategies provide multiple entry points for a diversity of learners, promote rigorous habits and foster student discussions reflective of high levels of student thinking and involvement. (1.2)
  - Teacher practice incorporates various strategies and learning materials to engage and meet the needs of a diversity of learners including special education students. Sentence starters and graphic organizers were used consistently as supporting aids to ensure that students gained access to corresponding curricula. Teachers served as facilitators of learning, actively promoting student-to-student discussions and group work for all students, including students with disabilities. For example, in one classroom, students used a penny protocol to discuss a topic centered on connecting and discussing the concepts of Laissez-faire and Social Darwinism to the growth of big business in the United States after the Civil War. Student-to-student discussions in this and many classes, comprised of mixed-ability, heterogeneous grouping, were on task and demonstrative of student inclusivity and risk taking. Furthermore, work products were reflective of higher order thinking skills and embedded school instructional practices that represent EL's philosophy; whereby learning is active, challenging, meaningful, public and collaborative. For example, at the close of one unit, students created a children's chemistry book designed to communicate chemistry processes in an easy to understand way to a young learner. These books were read to students at a local school thereby reinforcing the schools commitment to service and ensuring that all students have challenging opportunities to demonstrate their thinking in work products.
  
- Teachers implement grading policies aligned to the curricula and use ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessments to adjust instructional decisions and meet student needs. (2.2)
  - The school supports the use of authentic assessments designed to evaluate student performance against learning targets. To that end, teachers provide exemplars to support student learning and many assessments are actualized as an end of unit project or service activity where students are asked to demonstrate their learning. Rubrics are designed and aligned to the CCLS to provide students with clear expectations for work. The school believes that grades should clearly communicate what students know and are able to do in each class and that students should have multiple opportunities to show what they know and can do. These principles are evident in the school's grading policy as well as the schools developing focus on Habits of Work and Learning (HOWL), threaded throughout teacher assessment practices. HOWL, sets student expectations for class, participation, and the quality to which they have self-assessed their own work. These practices aid in providing teachers and students with clear measures of achievement. In the classroom, teachers check for understanding through randomized calling on students and circulating the room during group work time to provide additional support and gauge student understanding. As an Expeditionary Learning school student presentations are an integral part of assessment of student work products across classrooms. Students spoke to the feedback they have obtained in this process via student-led conferences and the growth they have experienced in the assessment

process. Furthermore, teachers consistently use exit tickets and student self-assessment that provides a clear portrait of how students are performing relative to the learning target. For example, in one activity students worked to self-assess the quality of their introduction paragraph using an argumentative essay rubric and shared their findings with a partner as the instructor circulated the room to gather data from these conversations to modify subsequent lessons as needed. These assessment practices provide a clear understanding of student progress and foster effective instructional adjustments in teacher practice.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Deepen the work in curriculum development to ensure Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) alignment across grades and subjects that is refined using data to promote college and career readiness. (1.1)
  - School leaders believe in developing and designing a curriculum that is clearly mapped and detailed which would enable teachers, even those unfamiliar with the topic, to access CCLS aligned and Expeditionary learning material to guide their preparation and teaching. The school is in the process of this work, as well as the work of fully aligning school curricula to the CCLS, content standards and instructional shifts. Currently, teachers are encouraged to develop lesson plans that incorporate the standards and align with EL learning targets. Some of the school's units reflect these practices via the incorporation of relevant learning targets, rigorous tasks and scaffolds. For example in one class' the task was to design a water awareness portfolio to educate the public about the global water crisis on a local and international level via the development of a proposal for one of the third world nations. This plan contained an area labeled "Access for All" which explained what accommodations would be made during the class for English language learners and special education students as well as a detailed portrayal of what the teacher's role will be during the lesson. However, across curricula units and plans in various subjects, CCLS and content standards alignment is uneven; with select units not referencing standards at all. Furthermore, the instructional shifts were not consistently embedded in curricula planning practices. Lastly, although the staff has received training on unit modification using student work, teachers could not speak to a curriculum modification or refinement system in place for planning, but have referenced changes in classroom practice based on student work analysis. In absence of these structures and modifications, the school curricula lack coherence resulting in limited opportunities for students to achieve college and career readiness.
- Strengthen structures to ensure that student learning experiences promote the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors and contain clear channels for student input and feedback. (1.4)
  - School leaders provide a safe school environment where students are known well and structures are developing to foster the enhancement of student academic and personal behaviors. Students are divided into houses and to encourage school pride and compliance with school rules students receive 'reward' points based on behavior and service. As an

Expeditionary Learning school, each teacher teaches a grade level "Crew" course which is a structure for advisory. "Crew" courses are intended to have a general focus on character, relationships/teamwork, literacy, service, and reflection. However, upon review of "Crew" learning materials, although professional development around "Crew" is ongoing, units currently do not reflect thorough planning and structure and school staff is in the process of strengthening student learning experiences to align with community and family outreach. In addition to "Crew", the school has also enacted a Habits of Work and Learning program that is used to embed a list of student expectations into traditional learning material so that students are not only assessed on academic achievement, but also assessed on work habits and behaviors. However, student testimony revealed that although these structures are in place, students state that they do not yet truly hold an active voice in school decisions, and they desire to contribute in this manner. Students provided feedback regarding the need for more electives, adding more activities to physical education, revising "Crew's" structure, and adding sports programs. School leaders are working actively to further engage the student body, and to ensure consistency after recent modifications in the "Crew" structure. Nevertheless, students expressed that without an active student council this input cannot be adequately addressed. As a result, students are hindered from becoming a valuable partner and voice in building school culture.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: <b>Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School</b>	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>				
<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?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<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?		<b>X</b>					
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			<b>X</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<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>