



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Quality Review  
Office of School Quality  
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support  
2013-2014**

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**James M. Kieran**

**Middle School 123**

**1025 Morrison Ave.  
Bronx  
NY 10472**

**Principal: Tyra L. Williams**

**Dates of review: January 15 - 16, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Arisleyda Ureña**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

James M. Kieran is a middle school with 506 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 27% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 90.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school administration fosters a collaborate culture characterized by a variety of structures that support students' academic, social, and emotional growth. (1.4)
  - The school administration partners with Fordham University School of Social Work and City Year to provide social-emotional and academic supports to students and families via home visits and various school based programs. Furthermore, Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) is a tool used to assess social-emotional strengths and resilience, thus tracking students' social and emotional growth to inform next steps for intervention and supports. In addition, the school has a child study team (CST) that meets weekly to discuss student progress and work with the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PIBS), mirroring a tiered structure of the academic Response to Intervention (RTI), by planning next steps for students in tier three for academic and behavior interventions. Furthering these efforts, the school also works with the Promise Zone, an organization that provides a variety of social services to families in order to ensure that family and students' needs are met. Parents shared that the school has different methods for communicating information about their children's academic progress and guidance support and they cited various workshops that they have attended as helping them to understand the school's grading policy, the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), and bullying. The parent coordinator, the school's lead teachers, and guidance staff, facilitate various workshops for parents about how to further their children's academic achievement and personal growth. After-school programs offer students and their families a variety of support services including homework help, access to resources, Regents courses in science and math, test prep programs, and sports, and extensive clubs on Fridays that include drama and chess provide engaging opportunities for students. Furthermore, in the student meeting, students shared work products and clearly explained how the support they received from their teachers helped them to improve their work and learning. As a result, students state that they "feel safe, everyone cares about us in the school, and we are learning a lot," this is evidenced by the increased number of students wearing the school uniform and maintaining a school wide attendance average to date of 90%.
- Teachers use common assessments to analyze student progress, inform instructional adjustments, and provide feedback to students to increase academic achievement. (2.2)
  - Across classrooms and grades, teachers develop CCLS aligned rubrics to provide students' with feedback on how to improve their work. In addition, students keep assessments, performance data, teacher feedback, and learning goals in a student portfolio. Portfolios shared by individual students had teachers' feedback reflecting clear next steps for improvement and mastery of the CCLS. In addition, the teachers and school leaders agreed to establish a school wide grade policy to further

align to the school's curricula across grades and content. As a result, coherence in messaging achievement and progress is evidenced by the students' ability to articulate their proficiency levels, learning goals, and progress. Students agreed that teachers' feedback "help them do better work and increase their score on performance tasks."

- The school uses pre- and post-unit assessments, checklists, conferencing notes, and other New York State data to monitor student-learning progress. Also, school leaders use Google.docs to store all school wide assessment data so that teachers are able to cross-reference interdisciplinary data to monitor and track students' learning progress across grades and subjects. Furthermore, pre- and post-assessment data is used to inform interventions and unit plans in all content areas. For example, teachers agreed to adjust the time for each unit's assessments and benchmarks in order to set timely learning goals for individual students, which align to school wide goals and the CCLS in literacy and math. Accordingly, teachers are able to monitor student learning from one unit to another through classroom observations, verbal and written responses, student work samples, lesson summaries, and assessment data. Hence, lead teachers created an Assessment Data Analysis Form that teachers across grades and subjects complete for each unit. As a result, teachers adjust curricula units and they have observed gains as evidenced by students' progress on the unit assessments.
- School administrators use the observation process, analysis of student work, and focused feedback, to communicate clear expectations that support teacher development and practice. (4.1)
  - As an outgrowth of observations, teachers stated that administrators provide immediate targeted feedback through individual conversations followed with next steps. In a teacher meeting, an English as a second language (ESL) teacher that was recently hired said that the school administration and teachers immediately provided her with additional mentoring, meeting time with coaches from the support network, outside education consultants, and targeted professional development to hone her instructional practice. Also, a math teacher shared how after a classroom observation, a supervisor noted that students were not engaged in activities where they had to apply their learning. Therefore, the feedback focused on identifying a learning task that required students' application of math concepts and the teacher shared that the principal followed up immediately by introducing 'Create A Similar Problem (CASP) as a means to create a learning activity. The teacher further said that the strategy allowed him to help his students become more prepared in solving word problems. In addition, written observation reports give teachers specific feedback on areas of strength, and areas in need of improvement that are aligned to a specific competency of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, along with recommendations for next steps. Recommendations include meeting with administration to discuss specific teaching strategies, scheduling of a one-on-one meeting with coaches from the support network (CFN), professional development on English as a second language (ESL) and Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) strategies, meeting with educational consultants to receive further support with English language arts Code X and the math CMP-3 curricula. To quote some teachers, they describe their learning experiences as "supportive

and engaging,” “collaborative and rigorous,” “resourceful and consistent,” and “focused.”

- Teachers consistently analyze student data and participate in leadership roles to support students’ progress and learning across the school. (4.2)
  - Teacher teams across the school take the lead in analyzing the school’s item-analysis data so that noted students’ learning gaps are addressed via different venues such as the instructional teacher team comprised of lead teachers, inquiry teams comprised of math teachers, and literacy teams comprised of social studies, science, specialty content, English as a second language (ESL), and English language arts teachers. Additionally, teacher teams across grades share effective strategies to impact student learning school wide. For example, in the literacy team meeting, teachers analyzed student work from English language arts to identify writing patterns of students’ strengths and challenges. At this meeting, teachers used a protocol to first identify what students can do, almost do, and not do. One teacher charted the information elicited from the team. At the end of the meeting teachers agreed that their next steps were to create a tiered vocabulary rubric from level 1 to 4, have students develop sentences with the vocabulary words, provide students with different examples of how to use the vocabulary words, and have other content area teachers use the vocabulary words so students have greater exposure to the work. As a follow up, the lead teacher shared data demonstrating how this collaboration resulted in increased students’ achievement on post-assessments from unit one to unit two.
  - As a result of professional collaboration between school leaders and teachers key decisions relative to professional development and teacher initiatives have developed. The instructional teacher team engages in facilitating professional development, and guiding and supporting teaching initiatives. For example, the team noticed a need to provide new teachers with data support. Accordingly, the team developed a unit-data tracker tool that allows teachers to document their students’ performance data for each unit and this led to a school wide practice of data analysis. Teachers’ active participation in school wide initiatives, teacher team meetings, and school committees increase teachers’ leadership skills, thus increasing teacher’s participation in inquiry work to improve student learning across the school.

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

- Further refine curricula to strategically emphasize rigorous habits across grades and subjects to build coherence, preparing all students for college and career readiness. (1.1)
  - The school has a focus on college and career readiness skills in all grades, with units emphasizing Regents level tasks that require students to read and cite evidence from texts to support ideas and arguments, develop writing skills, annotate work across levels, and create summaries after reading. Teachers use a common template and shared lesson plan format to craft curriculum maps and units, to ensure consistent and uniform emphasis on developing vocabulary in content area. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on increasing academic

vocabulary in all grades, with units accentuating tasks that require students to participate in vocabulary activities and apply it in their writing. For instance, in one of the classrooms visited, the teacher included key content words with synonyms and expected students to use these words in their writing responses to document-based tasks align to the history Regents curricula. In another class, students were grouped in tiers and worked in Response to Intervention (RtI) tiered tasks with the aim of “describing the importance of photosynthesis on our daily live.” However, while the group of students engaged in high-level discussion, the lesson plan did not have the adjustments to strategically engage all learners with meaningful extensions to deepen their thinking, and this was noted in the debriefing with the administration. Additionally, the seventh grade math teachers identified the need to include cognitively challenging tasks with real world applications to further increase critical thinking skills for all students. In the meeting with students, some students shared how they want the school to include “hands on learning experiences and research in order to learn additional information about the topics in the curricula and be more prepare for college and career.”

- Strengthen pedagogical practices to ensure consistent student engagement in high-level discussion, resulting in increased levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
  - The school's instructional focus this year is to improve questioning, vocabulary, and discussion techniques, so that students actively engage in lessons and develop critical thinking skills. With this goal in mind, the administration and the instructional teacher team have established norms for classroom instruction that include daily aims, do-now activities, vocabulary activities, lesson summaries, and learning tasks aligned to the CCLS. Although a few lessons attempted to engage students in high-level discussions, the learning activity questions and the questions posed by the teachers were not cognitively challenging. For example, in most classrooms visited, discussion was organized by the teacher asking rapid-fire questions and individual students answering in one word responses. Teachers who conducted summaries asked a few students to share their responses, and in another instance, the teacher used the summary as an exit slip, thus not affording students to engage in rigorous discussion and thinking. Furthermore, across grades, teachers inconsistently scaffold learning by not reviewing pertinent vocabulary to ensure that low proficient students are able to access the content, and learning tasks inconsistently provided multiple entry points for all learners, thus leading to uneven student engagement with students not required to make real world and/or interdisciplinary connections or self-reflect about their learning. Thus, current teacher practices missed opportunities to afford strategic multiple entry points and extensions for all learners including English language learners and special education students, impeding efforts to engage all students in high leveled thinking, discussions, and work products.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: James M. Kieran	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			X				
<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?			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>	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				
<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?			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>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>