

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Arturo Toscanini

**Middle School 145
1000 Teller Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: David McIntosh

Dates of review: May 22 - 23, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Arturo Toscanini is a middle school with 424 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 33% Black, 65% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 34% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 - 2014 was 88.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school utilizes their budget to support the prioritized goals through partnerships, professional development, and technology, to improve instruction and support students' learning needs (1.3)
 - In an effort to meet instructional goals this year, a partnership with Legacy Pathways was purchased to provide professional development for teachers to refine school improvement strategies. Using a 21st Century Technology Grant, the school provides training and resources such as laptops, which were obtained to support teachers in the creation of interdisciplinary curricula giving students opportunities to be interactive learners and fully engaged. With the support of the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI) grant, resources such as the Developmental Reading Program (DRP) and running records served as common assessments across the school. In addition, partnerships such as one with Urban Advantage expose inner city students to project based learning via science institutions, and another with Literature thru the Arts provides further training for teachers and student experiences with live theatrical performance and cultural events in an effort to further academically motivate students. As a result of introducing these initiatives, learning tasks demonstrate growth in volume as evidenced in student notebooks and work folders.
 - The school offers a variety of interventions to support at-risk students in order to accelerate learning. The administration groups students with teachers based on their instructional needs, using school and Regents' assessment data. At-risk students are scheduled for a block of English language arts and math academic intervention every day. Using Title I Priority funds, an after school program was established to target 200 students in need of academic support in reading and math to improve learning outcomes. In addition, a Saturday program provides intervention support to an additional group of identified students for support in English language arts and math to reinforce academic skills needed to improve student achievement. Furthermore, a partnership with Title I Digital Age Learning ensures certain staff members are properly trained for the learning objectives of the Saturday program. As a result, students are provided ongoing opportunities throughout the year to improve learning outcomes and become college and career ready.
- The school's vision for improved student progress is captured in focused goals for school improvement and embraced by stakeholders in a collaborative effort to advance student learning. (3.1)
 - School leaders and staff have developed a Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) that articulates a set of annual goals and action plans relative to the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) that is based on the Progress Report and State assessments, and outlines strategies for improving student results in English language arts (ELA) and math through enhanced curricula and enriched teaching practices. Professional development provides support for teachers on the Danielson framework to improve teacher planning and pedagogy. In addition, curriculum points, who are key

lead teachers within core subject areas, along with the principal's review of data to track student progress, focuses all staff on improvements in ELA and math. Adjustments of action plans are made based on student progress towards school wide goals. In order to meet the goal of improved student achievement on state ELA and math exams, the administration reviewed course passing rates and adjusted the instructional focus to have an emphasis on multiple entry points and productive struggle. As a result of these efforts, improvements in student work products have increased resulting in increased passing rates from last year's Regents exams based on school wide data.

- The principal makes continuous efforts to involve and communicate goals, which leads to an inclusive culture around school improvement and decision-making by including various constituents in the school wide planning process. For example, parents reported that they, "were involved", with the goal setting process and "are looking for ways to support the goals based on what is needed." In addition, students reported that administration shares school wide goals via charts around the school and they are able to comment to teachers about their own instructional concerns such as types of assigned projects. As a result of the ongoing communication efforts between the administration and school community there is shared commitment from all members to improve student learning.
- The school's curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and provide access to learning opportunities in order to meet the needs of diverse learners. (1.1)
 - Grade level curriculum maps and unit plans integrate the Common Core Standards (CCLS) in literacy and math and are embedded with instructional shifts. For example, curriculum maps include specific learning targets, multi-level guided questions, and instructional texts that are purposefully chosen for their alignment to CCLS, all of which offer opportunities to enhance teaching practices in classrooms. In addition, one ELA lesson plan contained a set of defined strategies aligned to instructional shifts three and four, to promote the school's focus on productive struggle and reading complex texts. The adoption of Expeditionary Learning as a literacy curriculum allows for emphasis on group work while the school uses the CMP3 program to hone in on the demands of the instructional shifts in math. New York State Glen Cove and McGraw Hill curricula are used in social studies and science and are supplemented with Common Core library tasks to insure CCLS alignment across subject areas. As a result, core subject curricula incorporate learning tasks that emphasize college and career readiness skills for students.
 - Adjustments to the school wide curricula are implemented within department team and cabinet meetings via curriculum point personnel. Key teachers across subject areas review curricula to insure activities integrate the school's instructional foci. Teachers use data from ARIS and school wide data to determine student areas for improvement. For example, in math, the curricula points and math team reviewed school data, which indicated that students were showing difficulty in understanding key concepts such as ratios, simple percentages, and linear relationships. Lessons were adjusted to integrate the use of visuals, graphs and other strategies to support student understanding of these concepts. As a result

of these instructional adjustments, student stamina in learning tasks has increased as observed by the school principal.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure the school culture includes structures that provide students with a safe environment which offers opportunities for decision-making and increased support to improve academic and personal behaviors.(1.4)
 - The principal's purchase of culturally relevant literature for classrooms, and encouraging teachers to display character-building posters in their classrooms to promote acceptance and inclusivity, evidences the school's numerous efforts to improve the culture of the school. Key staff members have been trained on Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) systems to reinforce positivity and expectations for behavior. Support staff assesses students' needs and insure proper placement in special education settings reducing negative behavior conducive to frustration from being in non-inclusive, specialized environments. The principal has advocated for the increase of security with network and district personnel and regularly meets with school officials from other schools in the building to insure protocols are in place. However, parents and students continue to feel that the increase of aggression is still prevalent with this school, especially within the outside perimeter of the building. Students stated that they would like to see "improvements in the behavior of other students". Parents stated although security is present and the principal is working to improve the school, "they fight a lot here." In addition, students stated that although they are able to state concerns around school issues, they are not provided the means to take part in decision-making. As a result of student and parent concerns, the school's approach still misses out on providing for a consistent approach in maintaining a culture of mutual trust and inclusivity.
 - The school has some structures in place to insure students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) are receiving the proper academic, social, and emotional support. A key staff member coordinates with teachers to maintain essential documents and student referrals so that students receive services as per their IEP. School based support team members intervene when students are off task and provide observational support for teachers. However, the school has yet to establish a clear, well-aligned system to provide targeted support and track the improvements of academic and personal growth of all students in the school. As stated by the principal, "the school will be developing systems to track this area for all students further next year." As a result of the lack of clear structures to monitor social emotional learning, the student attendance rate has decreased by 3% this year.
- Refine teaching strategies to embed multiple entry points so that academic tasks challenge all learners resulting in work products reflecting high levels of engagement. (1.2)
 - The school is working towards developing classroom practices that foster higher order thinking around student discussion. The school wide instructional focus on "Multiple Entry Points" has been implemented at different levels in some classes. For example, in one class, students worked together and used cognates to help them identify word meanings in

English in order to read through a complex text and complete the task. However, similar use of these practices was not prevalent in all classrooms. Although some classes reflected creative strategies for the purpose of engaging students in challenging learning tasks, several teachers' lack of implementation of suitable practices reflects inconsistent use of teacher scaffolding across classrooms as informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and thus did not allow all students to demonstrate higher-level thinking. The inconsistency of student opportunities for meaningful engagement hinders the ability for all students to participate purposefully in the curricula.

- Classroom practices are beginning to formulate a set of pedagogical beliefs around grouping students for discussion and higher levels of engagement. Several of the classes visited emphasized student groups and encouragement of students' active involvement in the class lesson. For example, in an English class, one teacher provided rigorous questions and media support via stationed groups during which students showed high levels of thinking using the book, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. One student's response consisted of meaningful insight, "She is lonely because everyone rejects her so she even rejects herself," and used text based evidence to support this idea. However, these teaching practices were not made evident consistently across classrooms, which led to uneven levels of engagement, impeding students' ability to fully demonstrate high levels of thinking within discussions and for specific learning tasks.
- Deepen the use of common assessment tools to monitor student progress in order to provide actionable feedback and adjust instructional practices so that all students' learning needs are effectively addressed. (2.2)
 - The school uses formative and summative assessment tools to determine student progress throughout the year. The use of rubrics, quizzes, and projects are prevalent across content areas. The principal encourages teachers to provide feedback to students via one-to-one conferences. However, a review of work products reflected an uneven amount of feedback support provided to students. For example, student writing products and other formative assessments reflected minimal amounts of written feedback only providing a grade score, and/or comments such as, "Very good!" The lack of effective, actionable feedback hinders students' ability to improve performance on learning tasks.
 - School leaders encourage the use of formative assessment practices. Teachers are beginning to use questioning strategies to determine student progress during a lesson. For example, in one art class, the teacher provided students' one-to-one support with their work as needed and determined by students themselves. In a math class, students were provided the opportunity to work within groups on a learning task around the Pythagorean Theorem while the teacher provided meaningful support to groups of students in the class by providing insights into the best ways they could develop their math story. However, across classrooms, assessment practices are not consistently ongoing nor do they include opportunities for student self-reflection. The lack of self-assessment hinders students' ability to effectively have ownership of their own learning. Furthermore, inconsistent checks for understanding do not allow for sufficient in-the-moment adjustments to lessons, resulting in missed opportunities to meet all students' diverse learning needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Arturo Toscanini	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