

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The School of Diplomacy Middle School

11X 370

**3710 Barnes Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Sean Licata

**Dates of review: May 13-14, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Flavia Puello-Perdomo**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School of Diplomacy is a middle school with 285 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 62% Black, 32% Hispanic, 2% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 88.30%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Instructional practices consistently reflect the school’s beliefs about how students learn best, with rigorous questioning and tasks that promote critical thinking by all learners, leading to high quality student products. (1.2)
 - Collaboration between teachers and administration results in instructional practices linked to the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, each classroom has an agenda that conveys to students the expectations for the day and teachers incorporate scaffolds that address students’ readiness levels by providing graphic organizers, tiered questions and opportunities for discussion, as students work in groups. Currently, the school’s instructional focus is evidence based discussions and effective questioning. For example, in an eighth grade English class, students cited textual evidence from a reading selection about Steve Jobs, during a class discussion. Students sat in groups and received discussion questions that required them to extract information from the text and complete graphic organizers that either summarized the key ideas or allowed them to make predictions, and develop questions. One group discussed the question, “What can you infer about the author’s opinion of John McCollum? What words does the author use to indicate this?” Additionally, in a science class, the activities and questions promoted student thinking and engagement, as students engaged in a discussion to figure out the differences between mass and weight. Students had to answer: “Why is knowing the mass of an object important? When would this information be relevant?” They also had to design their own procedures to teach other students how to use the triple beam balance. As students developed their procedures, the teacher required them to indicate why certain steps of the process were accurate or not. This supported all students in accessing the challenging task which allowed them to engage in higher order thinking. As a result, students’ work products highlight their increasing ability to cite evidence to support their arguments, both orally and in writing, as noted in their work samples and discussions.
- School leaders provide targeted feedback with clear next steps to teachers and develop professional development plans based on observation data, to build teachers’ instructional capacity. (4.1)
 - School leaders are very explicit in regard to the instructional practices that they expect to observe across the school. For example, with specific reference to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, the principal writes in one of the observations, “Over the next ten days, watch LO144 (Engaging students in Learning) and incorporate at least two strategies from this learning opportunity into your practice. Additionally, use the instructional strategy ‘Everyone Writes’ from *Teach like a Champion*. We will meet to discuss which strategies you choose and why. During my next observation, I will be looking for increased student engagement within your lesson.” School leaders also normed and calibrated their feedback by conducting learning walks at the beginning of the school year. The school culture further fosters the professional growth of teachers with feedback from intervisitations, based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching and a school developed visitation

tool. Teacher effectiveness is regularly tracked in the Advance teacher evaluation system to ensure ongoing alignment of feedback to teachers' professional goals and accelerate progress in relations to those goals so that student achievement is enhanced. In addition, the principal developed an internal tracking system to monitor data from the observation process and identify pedagogical trends. As a result of these feedback structures, next steps, such as suggestions on improving the use of accountable talk and questions stems, and developing students' use of textual evidence, have been incorporated by teachers, thus supporting their development, particularly around the targeted competencies of the Danielson Framework, as evidenced by data from the Advance system and observation reports.

- The current school professional development plan aligns with data collected from observations and with the current Instructional Expectations to promote improved teacher practice. Currently, the school professional development plan is focused on deepening teachers' application of the Depth of Knowledge continuum and understanding of the expectations embedded in Domains 1E (Designing Coherent Instruction), 3B (Questioning), and 3D (Using Assessment in Instruction) of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers shared that the principal is very supportive and provides them with multiple opportunities for intervisitations and differentiated professional development sessions, based on their areas of assignment and roles. Teachers also explained that any staff member who attends off site professional development workshops is required to turn-key this information to others. For example, some teachers received off-site training in the use of the Smartboard to support student engagement and supported others with this. In addition, one teacher conducted a workshop to help others strengthen their aims and make sure they are developing questions that incorporate Depth of Knowledge strategies, and teacher leaders turn-keyed behavior management strategies to other staff. The administrative team also provides development clinics focused on lesson planning and the collection of lesson artifacts, leading to improved teacher practice which has contributed to improved student work, as evidenced by student to student discussions in classrooms and samples of student work reviewed.
- The school leader and other staff communicate high expectations to students and their families and support them in meeting those expectations, leading to enhanced academic achievement by all students. (3.4)
 - The school leader publishes a weekly newsletter which highlights the school's expectations and celebrates best practices. The principal explained that at the beginning of the school year, the entire community participated in a reflective exercise that helped them to come up with school norms and expectations, thus promoting a shared responsibility to achieve those expectations. Additionally, they revisited these expectations in January 2014, in order to re-focus the community's norms. To keep students informed about their academic progress, the school implemented an online grading system and the guidance counselor meets at least twice a year with every student, providing social-emotional support and resources for the high school admission process. Around 80 percent of the students use the Jupiter Grades program an average of 1.9 times per week to track their academic progress and the parents registered, use it an average of 2.4 times per week. Parents stated that teachers and administrators are extremely accessible and engage them in dialogue related to daily assignments and student progress towards goals for their next grade level. Parents also reported that through workshops

they obtain guidance in understanding the high school admission process and regularly receive emails, phone calls and letters from the principal and other school staff, informing them about the school's expectations around student attendance, behavior, and academics. School staff and support organizations provide enriched activities, including an accelerated integrated algebra class for grade 8 students. Additionally, a partnership with the Leadership Program allows students to participate in activities such as martial arts, drum, steps and other extracurricular activities, as well as homework help and other academic supports across the grades. As a result, students and their families are highly engaged in school activities and aware of the steps needed for students' ongoing progress towards college and career readiness goals.

- The school provides a nurturing environment with a range of structures that support the academic, social and emotional development of all students. (1.4)
 - The school has developed multiple partnerships to ensure ongoing improvement in student engagement and teachers' classroom management skills. For example, the school is currently working with Creative Connections, The Leadership Program, Ramapo for Children and Stellar Adler Studios, community partners that provide academic and social-emotional support for students. Teachers are linked with a partner based on classroom needs and the school's Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) team was trained outside of the school and then turn-keyed behavior modification strategies to other staff. School leaders and the dean support teachers with assessing the level of intervention offered in their classroom, especially for particular teachers identified in need of support in this domain. The principal indicated that he has seen a decline in incidents of misconduct, particularly for students who are involved in the extracurricular activities offered. Students and staff reported that they feel safe in the school and parents appreciate the principal's willingness to listen to them and believe the changes he is making are moving the school in a positive trajectory. One of the parents stated, "In the three years I have been here, I have noticed the positive change, particularly now, as the principal is impartial." A parent of an eighth grade student also shared that her son is sad to be leaving the school. The principal noted that parents are more engaged with the educational process, as evidenced by an increase in parents' response to the School Survey: 32% completed it this school year compared to only 8% the previous year. Each class has a representative who attends frequent meetings with the assistant principal to coordinate student activities and share insights. Eighth grade representatives meet with the principal to discuss graduation activities and the principal conducts grade and school level assemblies to celebrate student achievement. As a result of these supports, there is improvement in the school environment, as evidenced by a 41% reduction in behavioral infractions, as per data from the Online Occurrence Report System (OORS) and an increase in student engagement, as reported by staff and students.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to expand coherence and alignment of curricula to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) across grades and subjects, to meet the instructional needs of all students and prepare them for college and careers. (1.1)
 - The school uses Common Core aligned materials recommended by the New York City Department of Education to support literacy and mathematics

instruction. In alignment to the instructional shifts, students are expected to use domain specific vocabulary and the school utilizes the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) continuum to ensure that teachers are developing rigorous tasks, with questions that promote higher order thinking across all content areas. The principal has encouraged all teachers to include discussion and academic language in unit plans and curriculum maps in order to support college and career readiness across content areas and grades. Teachers are also encouraged to use a school-wide lesson plan template that aligns to the CCLS and the Danielson Framework but this practice varies across content areas. Currently, the school is using the CMP3 mathematics curriculum and teachers are making adjustments to meet individual needs by using various components from the program, along with supplemental materials. They are also using resources from Engage New York and follow the New York City pacing guide. The literacy team has worked on revising units and tasks from the Codex curriculum in order to scaffold class activities and address learning gaps identified through baseline assessments. However, department teams are at various developmental stages in adapting and revising curricula and performance tasks, thus inhibiting school wide alignment and lessening vertical coherence in skill building and content across grades and subject areas. For instance, after meeting with teachers, it was not clear that teachers are clearly mapping content and skills that they expect students to learn, in a manner that supports curriculum alignment across content and grades. Additionally, in some instances lesson plans did not demonstrate how the content to be covered was connected to previously learned concepts and ideas. This lack of purposeful connections and alignment for curriculum development, limits students' opportunities to develop background knowledge and consistently engage in tasks that promote higher order thinking.

- Refine assessment practices so that they consistently lead to regular, targeted adjustments that support all students' learning needs, thus promoting their mastery of standards and rapid progress in attaining learning goals. (2.2)
 - The school uses baseline assessments to determine student mastery of key standards across content areas. Nonetheless, the ability to apply this information to plan and modify curricula and the use of ongoing assessment differ between teachers and across classes. In some classrooms teachers assess students through conferencing, class work, portfolios, tests and the use of "exit slips", where students reflect on their learning. In an eighth grade science class, the teacher checked students' understanding through verbal prompts and purposefully selected students to answer specific questions, in order to assess the need to make timely instructional adjustments to ensure all students were able to meet the objective and understood the task. These practices were also evidenced in a sixth grade math class. However, other classes had limited ongoing checks for understanding, thus inhibiting teachers from making adjustments in their questioning and directions for tasks. Moreover, conversations with teacher teams revealed that teachers did not consistently develop interim assessments to periodically assess student improvement and academic needs and some were still relying on information obtained from benchmarks to make instructional decisions. This limited their ability to develop instructional targets based on the results of current student performance data. Consequently, opportunities are not consistently harnessed to accurately determine students' progress towards goals across grades and subjects, thereby impairing timely and targeted curriculum and instructional adjustments and minimizing students' opportunities to increase their level of thinking and thus accelerate their learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: School of Diplomacy	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