



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

M.S. 390

10X390

**1930 Andrews Avenue
Bronx, NY 10453**

Principal: Robert Mercedes

Dates of review: February 25-26, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Melodie Mashel

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

M.S.390 is a middle school with 417 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 19% Black, 81% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 34% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's Common Core aligned curriculum builds school wide curricular coherence and provides students with access to engaging and rigorous academic tasks. (1.1)
 - The curricula across grades and subjects is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with an ongoing focus on increasing students' ability to express claims, as well as cite evidence from text to support their opinions and thinking in both verbal and written arguments. In addition, planning documents show that students are asked to read a variety of texts and expected to readily respond to high level essential questions and substantiate claims citing specific evidence from text. A seventh grade literacy lesson plan outlined how students would refer to their text documents to support their assertions in persuasive essays as to whether the word *God* should be included in the *Pledge of Allegiance*. Review of an eighth grade social studies unit plan revealed teachers embedded literacy shifts into discipline specific content lessons. An eighth grade social studies plan contained written citations from primary and secondary documents to support student declarations on whether the United States should have entered World War I. As a result of the implementation of a CCLS aligned curriculum, students across the school are immersed in a rich coherent curriculum that prepares students for college and career and promotes student higher level thinking, resulting in 75% of students in the 8th grade social studies classes improving their written essays since the beginning of the year.
 - Well planned teacher lessons engage students in curricular tasks that promote student thinking. Consistently high expectations for all students including sub groups provide students with rigorous learning experiences. To support English language learners, teachers embed key vocabulary into written plans with the expectation that students use the words in their written pieces. A review of student persuasive writing samples produced by English language learners from an eighth grade bilingual class reveals student use of words such as majority, government, economics and other domain specific words in their persuasive essays about whether English should be the official language of the United States. In an eighth grade math class, students learning about the properties of dilations used math terminology in the written explanations of the multi-step problems they solved. As a result of the school's rigorous curriculum, all students participate in lessons that engage them in challenging tasks and elevate their thinking.
- Teachers use common assessments and rubrics aligned to Common Core Learning Standards that effectively provide students with next learning steps to improve the quality of their work. (2.2)
 - The school incorporates the use of multiple assessments across classrooms to gain a clear understanding of student learning and progress.

Information gathered from English language arts test simulations, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment results, Document Based Questions, end of unit tests, baselines, midlines and rubrics provide students with actionable feedback that informs them of their next steps. Students eloquently articulated that the use of rubrics guided them to move their work to a higher level by “working step by step with what the rubric tells you to do.” Students stated that after their work is reviewed, teachers give them feedback and they can improve their work and perform better on a subsequent task. In addition, students spiritedly shared that the school’s new Engrade system, an online system that stores student assessment information, further supports their ability to take responsibility for monitoring their own progress and assessing if they are on track to meeting the school’s grading policy. As a result of these practices, teachers closely follow student progress and students assess their own growth toward mastery of the standards.

- Teachers use data culled from a variety of assessments to inform adjustments to curricula and practice. The school’s recent administration of an English language arts simulated test revealed students needed additional support in the development of their writing, specifically in their use of transitional words and phrases. Consequently, teachers immersed students in reading texts rich in the use of transitional phrases and words that served as the exemplar for students. Furthermore, to support students in breaking down test questions, teachers decided to provide additional lessons that modeled for students the importance of highlighting key words in a question. As a result, adjustments made provided students with the necessary supports to improve the quality of their written responses to questions resulting in 18% of eighth grade students improving the level of their written answers to short response test questions.
- School leaders use data from cycles of observations and explicit feedback to inform teacher professional development and improve teacher practice. (4.1)
 - The school’s administrative team has devoted considerable time to ensure that all team members developed a clear understanding of providing actionable feedback to teachers that supports the improvement of their practice. Initially, the team observed teachers together to cultivate a shared understanding of best practices and plan a course of action with targeted next steps for teachers. Observation reports reveal feedback that captures teacher strengths and areas to be further developed. School leaders provide teachers with focused next steps around the specific competencies from Danielson’s Framework. Written feedback provided to a teacher by the principal informed the teacher to raise the level of student discussions by posing open ended questions to students. Principal written feedback to another teacher indicated the need for the teacher to elevate the level of instructional tasks by using the Depth of Knowledge rubric as a guide. As a result, school leaders’ targeted feedback effectively supports teacher development and elevates the expectations for teacher instructional practice.
 - School leaders use the information gathered from observations to gauge teacher capacity and inform the school’s professional development plan. Administrators determined the need for teachers to strengthen their ability to facilitate student discussions. Consequently, lead teachers with

expertise in this area provided demonstration lessons to other teachers to effectively strengthen teacher practice in elevating and engaging students in discussions. In addition, driven by observation data, school leaders strategically assigned key staff members to subject leader positions to further support teacher instruction. As a result of teacher participation in focused professional development experiences that align to their needs, since the beginning of the year, over 50% of teachers elevated their practice in the area of student discussions as evidenced by ongoing observations by school administrators.

- The principal makes purposeful organizational decisions around teacher assignments, student programs and partnerships that support student performance. (1.3)
 - The school leader's commitment to secure grants and funding sources supports the fruition of programs and community collaborations that meet the needs of students. The principal uses funding from a variety of sources to upgrade technology across the school. Classrooms are equipped with Smart-boards and document cameras, and students have access to laptops and iPads. In addition, the school has been awarded a grant to develop a new state of the art computer lab. The school's investment in Engrade, a computer program that stores and tracks student data facilitates student, teacher and parent monitoring of student progress. Parents state that through the use of an Engrade computer application, they receive texts with their child's progress and the process makes it easier for them to receive information even at their work places. To meet the social and emotional needs of students school leaders' and staff engaged in an in depth study of the work of Ross Greene, Ph.D. around Collaborative Problem Solving, thus spawning partnerships with community based organizations that address student and family social and emotional needs. The school's partnerships with local hospitals and health agencies provide ongoing services to families. As a result of these decisions, resources are used to support student needs resulting in a 50% increase in the grades students receive in their subject courses.
 - Administrators designed a rigorous interview process for perspective teachers. Candidates are expected to respond to carefully crafted questions and a set of additional criteria created by school leaders and a committee of teachers. Identified students participate in after school and Saturday programs for academic intervention, English as second language services or Regents preparation. To further support students academically, the principal assigned literacy homeroom teachers to provide targeted students with academic intervention services. In addition, a variety of extra-curricular classes are offered to students including chess, basketball, band and chorus. Eighth grade students also participate in the Bronx District Attorney's program where laws and appropriate decision making are the topics of discussion. To continue to ensure the school is the center of the community, the school has committed to maintaining the school library open beyond school hours and for half days on Saturdays. In addition, eighth grade students serve as mentors and are paired with incoming sixth graders to support their smooth transition into middle school. Furthermore, to prepare students for high school, students visit high schools throughout the city and so students may be exposed to the "best," the school has partnered with a local specialized high school. As a result of these meaningful decisions, students are familiar with the

expectations of high school and prepared to meet the challenges of college and career.

Areas for improvement

- Strengthen instructional practices so that teachers consistently provide all students entry into lessons and curricula that promote student higher level thinking. (1.2)
 - School leaders and staff believe students learn best through multiple experiences using a variety of learning modalities. Some teachers planned and delivered lessons that engaged students in learning opportunities that immersed students in discussions and writing experiences where they defended a position. In a seventh grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class all students engaged in dialog about their stances and the teachers used a fishbowl strategy to allow students to hear varying opinions and thoughts from a different group of classmates. However, in a sixth grade ICT class, while students expressed and supported their opinions, the conversations were directed to the teacher and opportunities for classmates to share with each other were limited, thus hindering the opportunity for students to listen to the perspectives of others and to expand their thinking.
 - The school has successfully improved teaching strategies that support the English language learner. Building from recommendations from the school's previous Quality Review, translanguaging, a method of translating key elements of lessons to the student's native language is used in bilingual classrooms, thus providing a range of English language learners the opportunity to access lessons. In addition, teachers scaffold lessons for special education students through a variety of instructional strategies including small group instruction and student one to one conferring, thus providing these sub groups with multiple entry points into daily lessons. However, while the school has addressed the needs of its sub groups and is experiencing particularly strong achievement results with Hispanic and black males, structures and supports to address the needs of higher performing students are limited, thus hindering students already at standard levels to maximize their learning potential and perform beyond standard levels.
- Intensify the work of teacher teams to include the deep analysis of student work to bolster instructional adjustments that improve student learning outcomes. (4.2)
 - Strategically designed teacher teams meet weekly to examine student work, analyze assessment results or plan and modify curriculum. Teachers meet by grade level and partner according to aligned subjects. For example, science and math teachers meet together and English language arts and social studies teachers meet together. Eighth grade teachers met to analyze student math assessment results. Teachers identified and logged challenges students encountered with the assessment, noting student difficulty in understanding the question, math terminology and the precise use of mathematical tools. Consequently, they grouped students in four quartiles to correspond with the levels on the rubric used to assess student work. However, teachers had not yet arrived at a common understanding as

to how to score student work using the rubric, thus preventing teachers from gaining clear insight on student performance and hindering their ability to increase student achievement and meeting the school's goals.

- Teacher teams meet to analyze student work. The school's seventh grade English language arts/social studies team examined student short and extended responses from an English language arts simulated test. Teachers determined students had difficulty responding to both the short and extended responses. As a result of examining student assessments results, teachers identified adjustments to be made, focusing on student peer review, break down of assessment question and working with students on deciphering between relevant and irrelevant information. However, suggestions that addressed teacher pedagogy were limited, thus hindering teachers from improving their instructional practice that supports student progress toward mastery of standards.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

| School name: M.S. 390 | 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 |