

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Metropolitan Soundview

High School 521

**1300 Boynton Avenue
Bronx
NY, 10472**

Principal: Michael Lanaghan

**Dates of review: Feb 5 - 6, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Metropolitan Soundview is a high school with 316 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 29% Black, 65% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian, and 2% American Indian or Alaskan Native students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 83.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

What the school does well

- Strategic use of resources support long-term goals for teaching and learning that promote and enable students' achievement of college and career ready standards. (1.3)
 - Since the opening of the school, three years ago the principal has been steadfast in building capacity within his young staff, focusing tactically on development of instruction, infrastructure, and routines to provide supports necessary to close the achievement gap for the school's high-needs student body. Thus, one vendor was selected to work with teachers to develop their pedagogy, lesson planning, and curriculum development, resulting in departmental curricula that are aligned to content standards and Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Another vendor was contracted to support teachers' understanding of youth development and effective management and discipline, which has resulted in well-managed classrooms even though 64% of teachers have less than three years' experience and overall 73% of teachers less than five years' experience. Emphasis on creating a strong technology infrastructure has supported differentiation and student engagement through use of Smart Boards to facilitate student demonstrations and integration of video clips within lessons. Laptops, iPads, and desktop computer labs, are used by students to conduct research, access bilingual materials, complete online remediation, and maintain online work portfolios on Google Docs. As a result of these strategic actions, students express that they are engaged in meaningful learning which has brought them academic success. Progress Report scores reflect achievement supporting the school's long-term goal of closing the achievement gap with the school at 100% percent of peer and 59.5% of City ranges for the metric 'Average Completion Rate for Remaining Regents.'
 - The principal hires a surplus of teachers, investing in human capital purposefully, to reduce teacher-to-student ratio for all students including the school's large population of students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs). In many classes, two teachers are assigned to partner together to team teach, expanding collaboration and mutual accountability in providing support to students and promoting academic achievement. Furthermore, the principal's recruitment of dual-licensed general and special education certified teacher candidates enables greater flexibility in programming to meet special needs. Careful attention to students' progress resulted in an recognition of an identified need for increased time-on-task to achieve proficiency leading to the implementation of double period English and math courses for all ninth and tenth graders. In addition, smaller classes are created for those students most at-risk and teachers are specially selected to maximize success in those classes. As a result of these practices, 83% of eleventh grade English language learners and student with disabilities are on track in terms of credit accumulation. Additionally, for 2012-2013, the school achieved a 76% pass rate in Regents' Algebra with 22% of students scoring at the college ready threshold for 99 ninth and tenth grade participants and a 91% pass rate in Comprehensive English, with 74% of students scoring at the college ready threshold for 43 ninth and tenth grade participants.

- A culture built upon staffs' service to students, fosters mutual respect, a positive work ethic, and a peaceful learning environment, that contributes to the academic and personal growth of both students and staff. (1.4)
 - Listening to students and providing avenues for student voice and choice are values that are exemplified in the school's instructional philosophy entitled LOCK for literacy, opinion, choice and knowledge. Additionally, the school's desire to ensure that students feel safe and are an integral part of school life, shapes a theory of action that promotes adults' constant watchfulness and dedicated effort in developing social-emotional and academic learning to ensure that all students are making progress to established benchmarks. As the school's union representative relates, "Administration makes sure you understand before you sign on-board." This buy-in makes certain that teachers work continually to improve their skills and thus contribute to creating a safe and supportive learning environment in which they thrive as well as do the students. Teachers use advisories and their team meetings to surface concerns and they communicate through Google Docs with administrators who provide written feedback and follow-up, assuring timely referrals to appropriate support staff. Additionally, students express trust in their teachers, administrators and guidance counselor and say they feel safe in school. One student noted that the guidance counselor would "automatically know if something was wrong". The principal states that, "Students have a lot of individual voice." Students concur, stating that teachers and administrators "care about what they have to say". Creation of school clubs, selection of new electives, and even changes in teacher supports have occurred based on student suggestions and complaints. Consequently, this well-defined culture of support promotes personal growth. A parent praised the school's consistent expectations and communication as helping her son improve relationship-building noting that he has become "more affectionate, friendlier, and polite". In its most recent Progress Report, the school achieved 91.7% of peer range in the category of safety and respect and 100% of peer range in the categories of academic expectations, communication, and engagement.

- Intentional work in aligning curriculum to Common Core Learning Standards ensures that all learners have access to challenging tasks that promote college and career readiness skills. (1.1)
 - Teachers pay attention to what the standards require students to know and do as they plan academic tasks. Using Understanding by Design (UbD) as a planning tool to help in developing an effective framework to deliver a standards-driven curriculum, teachers identify explicit learning outcomes that require students to interpret, apply, and evaluate perspectives. Thus, students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, across classrooms, participate in academic tasks that require them to apply and extend their learning. For example, tenth graders analyzed primary and secondary source documents tackling questions requiring them to explain how Hitler influenced people's thinking, and to speculate as to why the Nazis appealed to the German people in the 1930's. Ninth graders were asked to cite textual evidence in identifying similar key themes found in the books "Fahrenheit 451" and "Speak". In Algebra, students studied scenarios about monetary investment and wrote detailed explanations of how exponents and logarithms can be used to evaluate various investment options. In a Living Environment class, students considered the question of "What constitutes a living organism?" as a basis for writing an argumentative

essay regarding a recent case in the media, supporting either right-to life or right-to die advocacies based on their interpretation of what constitutes characteristics of life. After reading the “The Lord of the Flies,” eleventh graders wrote essays to address the question of whether man is inherently good or evil, researching the philosophies of Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke to defend their position against counterclaims of differing opinion.

- Incorporating the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), teachers deliberately develop curriculum and scaffolds for learning to ensure that all students have the support they need to access grade level tasks. Across departments, teachers develop tools for students such as graphic organizers, guided notes to introduce new topics, lists of signal words for argumentative and persuasive writing, sentence starters, paragraph outlines, and use visuals, videos, and bolded key words in hand-outs to promote students’ learning. As a result, students at varying levels of academic proficiency are able to successfully navigate assignments and express confidence in achieving the school’s goal of scoring 80% or above on exams and grades.
- Frequent observations using the Danielson Framework for Teaching provide a basis for feedback and support plans that promote professional reflection and improved pedagogy. (4.1)
 - Administrators recognize that timely feedback improves pedagogy so written feedback is given to teachers within four days of all observations and tracked on Google Docs. The school purposefully does not schedule far ahead so that supervisors have flexibility in prioritizing additional observations and providing strategic follow-up support based on immediate needs. On-going professional development and supervisory assistance foster acceptance of Danielson as a useful tool to norm practice. As one teacher stated, the assistant principal “lets us know in a positive way that we are not quite there”. Feedback that challenges thinking with questions such as “How do you know your English language learner students are making progress?” or next step suggestions encouraging pre-planning of questions, provide support within well-defined expectations for effective pedagogy. Additionally, new hires have an assigned colleague-buddy and receive dedicated supervisor and network support, and detailed plans and logs of assistance are created for targeted teachers who receive extra observation, arranged inter-visitations, consultant support, and lesson plan evaluation to support their professional development. Consequently, accurate feedback challenges teachers to be reflective about and improve their practice and to make pedagogical modifications that improve student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Further clarify the link between belief and pedagogy using the school’s framework for teaching to ensure greater consistency of practice to deepen the active engagement of all students. (1.2)
 - Administrators and teachers describe the school’s belief system as revolving around their LOCK instructional philosophy incorporating literacy, opinion, choice and knowledge. While teachers accept and try to embed these tenets into their practice, their application is not sufficiently consistent. For example, while reading and writing tasks are integrated into lessons and culminating unit performance assessments

support the school's focus on literacy, the school has not intentionally defined parameters for the integration of literacy skills into daily instruction across content areas. Although teachers state that students know and use annotation skills to comprehend text, students were not observed employing this skill. As a result, students are not held accountable to practicing essential literacy strategies, impairing their ability to fully comprehend complex text on their own.

- While students in all classes visited were very obediently engaged, tackling all required tasks to completion, lessons tended to be teacher dominated with discourse primarily focused between teacher and individual students. Whereas students in an Algebra class and a Trigonometry class shared thinking with peers, questioned each other and their teachers as they solved math problems, and presented their work, students in an English class did not share or expand their thinking through peer interaction, raising their hands to answer only direct teacher questions on the text they were reading. The lack of consistent opportunities for students to engage with each other and publicly defend their thinking limits full ownership creating lower levels of energy in classrooms. Thus, opportunities are missed for students to demonstrate their thinking at higher levels that promote personal investment in learning, rigorous verbal debate, and student questioning.
- Strengthen the use and analysis of assessments to identify learning trends to make informed instructional adjustments more astutely to improve students' academic mastery. (2.2)
 - Development of common assessments in English and math, as well as the use of protocols to review student work, are providing a platform for discussion at team meetings reflecting back to curricula development and expected outcomes. However, in-depth analysis of student work is still a growing skill. While teachers shared their observations of student work samples, expressing agreement about current student thinking and desired student thinking, they did not always provide specific details to support their evaluation. Thus, it was unclear if teachers were normed in their understanding as to what specifically demonstrates student strength and/or need in terms of academic skills proficiency. Teachers discussed possible interventions but did not clearly assess overall grade and subject trends to consider potential pedagogy changes. Thus, the lack of consistent emphasis in harnessing common assessment data impairs potential adjustments to curriculum and instruction to further student academic outcomes.
 - While teachers circulate often, interacting with their students, and make good use of exit slips to assess student comprehension and plan next day lessons, the astute use of rubrics with specific feedback to students is not well established. Rubrics are used mainly by teachers to grade. Written comments to students tend to be general in nature and do not reflect the specificity of rubric criteria. As a result, the identification of key next steps in implementation of strategic instructional adjustments is hindered and students miss opportunities to self-assess and understand next steps for acquisition of skills.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Metropolitan Soundview	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