



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Stephen Decatur School

Middle School K035

**272 Macdonough Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Jacqueline Charles

**Date of review: May 4, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago**

The School Context

Stephen Decatur School is a middle school with 185 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 89% Black and 10% Hispanic students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.3%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

The school communicates high expectations to all staff members and aligns professional development activities to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Numerous school-wide communications and ongoing student performance updates keep families informed of their child's development towards college and career readiness and promote partnerships with families to support student progress.

Impact

The school's structures for communication and many systems of support result in staff and families working collaboratively towards a clear path of higher student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal uses all elements of the Danielson Framework to inform expectations of classroom environments and instructional practices. These are communicated to teachers and staff via the staff handbook, notices, professional development workshops, and meetings and during one-to-one conferences. Network staff and the talent coach collaborate with the principal and teachers for continuous support on the effective implementation of the Danielson Framework and the Common Core Learning Standards in all classrooms. In addition, professional development sessions include focus on using student outcomes and student work to identify trends and plan instruction, while other sessions include instructional strategies to support student subgroups in English language arts (ELA) and math.
- Teachers are held accountable to instructional expectations via formal and informal observations that include verbal and written feedback. Feedback to one teacher included a discussion on using higher level questioning to generate thinking and promote in depth discussions among students for increased understanding and learning. Subsequently, the teacher joined a study group focused on how to assess higher order thinking skills in the classroom to enhance her instructional practices. Additionally, as part of the Teacher Incentive Grant (TIF), the school has established weekly teacher debriefing sessions following collegial walkthroughs and inter-class visitations. At one of the debriefing sessions teachers discussed the need to increase student engagement through questioning and discussion techniques such as accountable talk stems and Socratic seminar protocols.
- In addition to providing ongoing curricula and student progress information during parent sessions on Tuesdays, the school has hosted several parent workshops and informational events. These include "Family Common Core Learning Standards Workshop Series" held twice a month on Saturdays and the "High School Articulation Forum" where teachers and staff shared information with families on learning expectations in all subject areas for college and career readiness.
- Parents expressed that the school staff is exceedingly caring and nurturing and maintains ongoing communication with families through phone calls, one-to-one conversations, school newsletters, and weekly progress reports via Jupiter Grades', a computer based program that also provides strategies for use at home. Parents described the school as "hands-on" and stated "everybody takes a part in it."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school has aligned pedagogy with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and provision of instructional supports and hands-on learning experiences. However, the use of multiple entry points was not evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

Impact

The majority of teachers align the curricula and implement academic supports to yield meaningful student work products, yet there are missed opportunities so that some learners, including English language learners and special education students do not always have the strategic supports they need to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work products consistently.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's beliefs of how students learn best, informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching include hands on activities, application of knowledge to real world situations, and opportunities for questioning and discussion. For example, in an eighth grade science class, students used models and photographs of various animals to classify those animals based on characteristics such as physical traits, habitat, diet, and methods of obtaining food. Students worked in groups and engaged in discussions on how they were classifying the animals. In another classroom, students engaged in discussions of the human body's respiratory and circulatory system based on observations using visual models and textual evidence in readings.
- In most classrooms students were observed working in groups with support from teachers and paraprofessionals. Lessons included demonstrations of expected outcomes and learning that provided appropriate scaffolds for subgroups. These included visuals, illustrations, and bi-lingual dictionaries. However, in a few classrooms teachers did not provide supports and a few students demonstrated difficulty in tackling tasks. For example, in one ELA class all students were asked to read an article independently and to complete a chart based on information from their reading. A few students who did not fully grasp the meaning of the article did not complete the chart accurately and did not have sufficient opportunities to interact, discuss, and share their learning with their peers. Additionally, a few lessons observed consisted mainly of teacher-to-students questions and answers.
- While bulletin board displays in the halls contained many samples of student writing and learning in content areas and students' folders included work in English language arts and math, in a few classrooms student work products did not reflect high levels of thinking. For example, some math work samples reflected a completed series of math exercises in isolation of application or problem solving contexts.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

The school has made purposeful decisions in choosing curricula to align with Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers design rigorous tasks, support higher order skills and engage in data analysis to plan tasks that promote rigor for all learners, including student subgroups.

Impact

The use of student outcomes to plan rigorous academic tasks with an emphasis on higher-order thinking promotes coherence and gives a diversity of learners access to curricula emphasizing college and career readiness skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaborate in teams and make purposeful decisions such as integrating EngageNY math modules in the curriculum and emphasizing math practices reflective of the instructional shifts to ensure alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and units of study. In addition, teachers include standards from the New York City Scope and Sequence framework in science and social studies in the school's curriculum maps and pacing calendars to support the school's goal of college and career readiness.
- Teachers plan instruction and rigorous tasks that engage all students including English language learners and students with disabilities. For example, in one math class, the students explained the concepts of area and perimeter of a rectangle by designing their own bumper car ride blueprints. In another class, students shared their work on the Pythagorean Theory and its converse with their peers. The teachers in these classes assessed students' work and information shared to determine levels of understanding of the lesson concepts.
- Data outcomes and analysis of student work indicated that students needed more practice and engagement with using text based evidence to respond to questions and support claims. This led to teachers planning lessons to engage all students in rigorous tasks that promote critical thinking. For example, in a sixth grade ELA class, students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, discussed with partners how groups of people have been affected by human rights violations over time using text based evidence from various articles and informational texts. This activity encouraged student-to-student collaboration and reinforced the learning for all students, including student subgroups, as they received support from their peers.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

The school has implemented structures to measure learning progress through data analysis and during instruction that are used consistently to inform adjustments, meet students' instructional needs, and raise student awareness of next steps for learning to ensure lesson mastery.

Impact

Effective instructional adjustments meet students' academic needs, resulting in student mastery of learning objectives and gains in State assessments in ELA and math.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the majority of classrooms there are ongoing checks for understanding such as questions, student responses, student share outs, written assignments, and exit tickets that inform levels of understanding and learning. Teachers make instructional adjustments based on the information to support all learners including student subgroups. For example, in a social studies class, the teacher had students share with their partners and the class their thinking on how industrialization and immigration contributed to the urbanization of America and the progressive movement. The teacher worked with students having difficulty completing the assignment to offer assistance with their responses. In an ELA class, the teacher worked with a group of students that were struggling with completing task. The teacher guided the students' learning of comparing characters in a story by having the students use text evidence that showed how each of the characters were influenced by culture, time, and place and explaining their findings.
- The school uses a range of summative and formative assessments that includes results from State tests, Measures of Student Learning (MOSL), unit tests in content areas, New York Ready, running records, and Performance Series lexile levels to monitor progress for all learners. The analysis of assessment results has informed goals for teaching and the targeting of skills for instructional interventions with an emphasis in ELA and math. For example, this year the school identified making inferences and using text evidence in ELA and solving multi-step problems in math as areas in need of improvement.
- Teachers examine item analysis data from State tests and regularly look at student work in ELA and math to determine levels of student learning, identify areas of need, and adjust instruction to ensure mastery of targeted skills. For example, in response to work samples reviewed, teachers have refined the modeling aspect of lessons to include visuals and exemplars to ensure students are aware of lesson expectations.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	---	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Teachers meet in professional collaborations and analyze assessment results and student work to share best practices that lead to achievement of goals for all students. The school leader promotes teacher leadership and encourages teacher input on key instructional decisions.

Impact

Inquiry-based teacher teamwork is building teacher capacity leading to increased student progress. Distributive leadership structures support staff collaboration and enhance pedagogical skills to increase student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly by subject with a focus on the implementation of the curricula and analysis of student data and work to plan lessons and improve instructional practices. For example, after reviewing written responses on an ELA test, team members determined that using text evidence to make a claim or express a point of view was an area of need for several students. Strategies discussed to support the students included emphasizing details in the text and increasing opportunities for students to interact and discuss with peers during the lesson. English language learner strategies discussed included increased use of visuals and practice of academic vocabulary. Teachers planned to share the students' progress at subsequent meetings.
- In addition to hosting visits from teachers and leaders from other schools and venues, teachers engage in inter-visitations within the school and participate in visits to network and neighboring schools to increase their own repertoire of best practices. Furthermore, network subject area specialists and instructional consultants support teachers via sharing of information and effective strategies to improve teaching.
- Teacher leaders meet with the school leader to plan professional development opportunities and to discuss growth towards improved pedagogical practice aligned with the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, based on the need to promote thinking at high levels among all students, questioning and writing across all subjects became areas of professional growth.