



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**Seth Low
Middle School K096**

**99 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Erin Lynch

**Date of review: December 4, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Isabel DiMola**

The School Context

Seth Low is a middle school with 649 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 12% Black, 29% Hispanic, 27% White, and 31% Asian students. The student body includes 28% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.4%.

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	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All teachers systematically examine data and student work within inquiry teams that embed effective distributed leadership structures.

Impact

Improvement of teacher practices and mastery of goals is embedded. Effective teacher leadership provides integral opportunities towards the academic achievement of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Inquiry teams across grades and content areas analyze aggregate data holistically from multiple sources including Expeditionary Learning baseline and culminating assessments, Measures of Students Learning (MOSL) writing tasks, and unit assessments in mathematics, science and social studies. For example, after reviewing data results using the item analysis of the 6th grade NYS math exam, it was realized that students across the grade performed substantially lower than the city average on Common Core Learning Standard 6.G.1, finding the areas of triangles, special quadrilaterals and polygons. Teacher teams modified the 6th grade math curriculum map to deepen the focus on the necessary strands of geometry by adding opportunities for students to engage with problems that require composing shapes to rectangles or decomposing into triangles and other shapes.
- Teams across grades and content areas found that student writing, specifically the ability to provide relevant evidence to support a claim, was an area of concern across the school. This finding led to the development of the instructional focus of increasing writing opportunities within all content areas. A review of units of study from all content areas provides evidence of focused instruction on writing strategies and performance tasks that offer students opportunities to demonstrate their learning through open response questions and argumentative writing. For example, a review of the 8th grade math curriculum map evidences that writing tasks are embedded, such as asking students, “How can the same mathematical ideas be represented in different ways and to explain why that would be useful?”
- Teacher leaders collaborate with administrators in creating and implementing a professional development plan, receive support in building leadership and facilitative skills, and are emerging as leaders of the professional learning communities. During a teacher interview, they articulated that they felt they have an integral role in identifying school-wide trends, leading professional development by sharing best practices and offering input into crucial school-wide decisions that include curricula revision, use of resources, and implementing strategies that expand opportunities for students. For example, teacher leaders in English Language Arts facilitated the modification of units of study within the Expeditionary Learning program to ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), the instructional shifts as well as to embed supports and opportunities for students to practice acquiring prerequisite skills necessary to complete Common Core Learning tasks in all content areas

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While pedagogy provides consistent instructional supports including the use of strategic entry points and scaffolds to meet the needs of all learners, the use of questioning and discussion and the ability to foster structures for student to student development of deep reasoning independent of teacher direction varies across the school.

Impact

Limited use of high quality extensions lead to missed opportunities in student ownership of work products demonstrating critical thinking in some classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- A majority of classes demonstrate the use of appropriate entry points and scaffolds to engage all learners. For instance, during a 7th grade Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) English language arts class, a lesson introducing the central theme of the next book the class would be reading, provided scaffolds for students, such as teacher modeling, use of visual and audio aids, graphic organizers and grouping that provided access to all learners.
- In all classrooms visited, teachers asked questions to elicit responses regarding contents. However, in only three of ten classes visited were questions used to stimulate student led discussion. In the remainder of the classes, teacher directed questions led to a teacher-student-teacher cadence of conversation.
- A review of student work in the vast majority of classes visited revealed consistent work in expanding student opportunities for writing, including argumentative writing where students state a claim and offer text based evidence. Yet, in depth analysis of content and demonstration of high levels of student thinking was only evident in some classes and student portfolios. For example, in reviewing student writing where they were asked to compare the attack on Pearl Harbor to the 9/11 attacks, students were able to appropriately articulate the facts of each occurrence. However, the writing did not consistently demonstrate students' ability to analyze and compare the impact of each attack on the United States through a social, political and economic lens.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with units of study and tasks being planned and refined through the analysis of data and student work products.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Revisions to units of study based upon ongoing data analysis ensures that a variety of learners including English language learners and students with disabilities have access to the curricula.

Supporting Evidence

- Refined units of study in all content areas integrate the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Planned strategies in unit plans include tiered academic vocabulary, multi-step problem solving, argumentative writing, and text-based responses. For example, a 7th grade English language arts unit focuses on individuals surviving in challenging environments. In addition to the anchor text, *A Long Walk to Water*, students read multiple complex texts that support the theme of the novel and answer several text based response questions including an essay answering "What factors made survival possible for Salva in *A Long Walk to Water*?"
- Curricula maps demonstrate that the school integrates Common Core aligned academic tasks through the adaptation of instructional materials from Expeditionary Learning, Engage NY, Connected Math Project 3 (CMP3), the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Common Core Library and the NYCDOE Science and Social Students Scope and Sequence.
- All units of study include an extended writing project that provides students opportunities to engage in the writing process within the instructional shifts, including draft writing, peer and self-assessment, revision and publishing. For example, an 8th grade unit ends with students researching and writing an argumentative essay on genetic modification and a 6th grade social studies units asks students to write an essay evaluating how political and environmental issues influence the development of a specific region of the world.

Findings

Teachers across content areas use common assessments, ongoing checks for understanding and track student progress, making adjustments to curricula based on their findings.

Impact

The school's systems that monitor progress by looking at student work, analyzing data and incorporating formative assessments during instruction inform adjustments in unit and lesson planning to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school utilizes common assessments across content areas, such as Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) performance based assessments, on demand writing pieces, NYS Practice Exams in math (MAP) and English language arts (ELAP) , Expeditionary Learning and Connected Math Program 3 (CMP3) pre and post unit assessments. At regulated intervals during the school year, administrators analyze data through item analysis to measure student performance and progress along the standards by grade, class, sub-group, and for individual students.
- Results from assessments in English language arts and mathematics are used to group students across the school two periods a week in a parallel teaching model. Students that demonstrate similar deficits or acceleration needs meet for two periods each week so content teachers can provide targeted instruction to meet their needs. For instance, students that demonstrate difficulty in identifying relevant facts from a text to support an argument are grouped together and engage in targeted instruction and practice opportunities to build their skills.
- Across content areas, teachers use entry and exit slips, conferring and teacher and student checklists to assess student work and make adjustments throughout lessons. Adjustments observed include changes in grouping, student selection for guided groups, and use of various graphic organizers including Venn diagrams, T-Charts and a writing support acronym known as , “restate, answer, cite, explain” (RACE). Students use rubrics, exemplars and checklists to self-assess their work.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

High expectations are consistently communicated to the entire school community including teachers, students and families. Multiple communications to parents place students on a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support high expectations across all constituencies establish a culture of mutual accountability with teachers moving toward reaching and exceeding expectations on teaching and learning, and school-family partnerships that support students' achieving college and career ready skills and behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Articulation of high expectations through faculty and team meetings, individual planning conferences, and professional development opportunities, administration consistently sets forth the expectations of data driven planning. Teachers are expected to use a variety of teaching methodologies, including a gradual release model, station rotation model and short segments of direct instruction. Teachers explain that they establish routines and procedures and differentiate instruction. Collaboration in planning and during team meetings creates a culture of mutual accountability and supports alignment of professional practice to the expectations of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Professional development informed by individual teacher data, student performance data and cycles of frequent classroom observations followed by effective feedback, peer inter-visitations and inquiry teamwork reinforce school-wide expectations.
- Parent engagement activities build family capacity to participate in their children's education. Parent workshops inform and reinforce the school's goals and expectations including Seth Low's acronym for the expectation of positivity, respect, integrity, determination, and empathy (P.R.I.D.E.). P.R.I.D.E. is prominently displayed throughout the school, on all handouts to parents and is part of every parent workshop agenda. Students, parents, teachers and administrators easily speak to the values of P.R.I.D.E. An 8th grade student explained, "that since P.R.I.D.E. has been stressed to us, the school is better, the halls are calmer and kids are nicer to each other". P.R.I.D.E. highlights the behaviors the school values to place students on a path of college and career readiness.
- Through surveys, the school receives information from parents on the workshops and activities they would be most interested in attending. Afterwards, workshops are planned using the information received from parents along with a school agenda. Each workshop has a staff share, where a faculty member presents to the parents. For example, parents reported that they were informed of the school's instructional focus and given strategies to assist students at home in reaching their goals during one workshop. Workshops also offer content requested by parents via parent surveys, including presentations on fire safety, health insurance options, and yoga classes. Surveys following the workshops indicate families value the offerings with comments such as "today's workshop was informative as well as interesting, I now know what to do when my child struggles," and "this was productive and enjoyable."