



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Willoughby

Middle School K162

**1390 Willoughby Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11237**

Principal: Barbara De Martino

**Date of review: March 4, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sheila S. Gorski**

The School Context

The Willoughby is a middle school with 483 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 6% Black, 88% Hispanic, 3% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school has established a system of accountability for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families. Structures are in place to regularly monitor student progress, professional development and supports for families

Impact

School leaders and staff collaboratively design professional training and family workshops aligned to the school's high expectations leveraged by the Danielson Framework for Teaching to promote college and career preparation for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate clear expectations via the school's staff handbook where they share most of the required structures and school policies and discuss them at the beginning of the school year. In addition, the handbook is available electronically as a resource and this helps to reinforce the school's expectations. A professional development committee composed of six staff members articulates pertinent topics informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, such as professional responsibilities. A professional survey assesses teacher strengths and needs citing "professional development needed" and "workshops that I have attended that I could turn-key to staff." Additionally, all teachers design professional goals using student data, classroom environment and instruction as reflection tools to create action plans to meet their goals. An example includes a professional development book study. Book study groups engage in professional readings, selecting from a menu of professional books, such as, *Looking Together at Student Work*, *Scaffolding Language/Scaffolding Learning and Strategies that Work*. Teachers also provide their rationale, or purpose for the literature selection stating, "To improve my professional practice", and for "professional development". Another teacher expressed that the discussion around question design was most beneficial; "Thick questions address large universal concepts and thin questions clear up confusion."
- The school engages in ongoing communication with families via e-mail and two online systems that parents and students use to access assignments, student progress, course grades, important information and events and to communicate with teachers. Parents expressed that they value the information they receive through the e-mails, a calendar of events, phone calls, backpack letters, progress reports, and the opportunity for weekly communication.
- The school's parent engagement block takes place every Tuesday for 40 minutes. Teachers select from a menu of face-to-face meetings with parents or caregivers, phone conversations, or written correspondence indicating the best way to communicate with their student's families. A review of teacher's logs shows that teachers and families engage in discussions, such as a SMART board presentation for curriculum night, explaining the tutoring process and obtaining parental consent for student tutoring, and discussion of progress reports. Parents expressed their appreciation for the support, communication and the additional time to meet with the staff and leadership.

Area of Focus

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

The majority of teachers engage in consistent analysis of teacher practice and student work within structured inquiry-based professional collaborations. Teachers monitor progress for groups of students they share, focused on improving student achievement.

Impact

While instructional practices align with the curricula and reflect the school's efforts to increase student engagement across grades and subjects, the school does not yet systematically engage in shared improvements in pedagogical practices to address the needs of all students, thus impeding a diversity of students from reaching mastery of goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teams of teachers that include the English language arts (ELA) members of the core inquiry team, and the instructional math team meet with the administrative staff on a weekly basis to discuss priority goals in each area of study. These meetings also occur during the school year to engage in data analysis, vertical planning, and examining student work and to make instructional adjustments to the school's areas of focus, such as professional development calendars and curriculum maps. Team representatives are the liaison between their grade level colleagues and school leaders.
- A grade 8 team engaged in a discussion informed by student work analysis regarding argumentative writing by selecting two essays, a low and a mid-level. Team members began their discussion using the tuning protocol and providing "warm" and "cool" feedback. The essential aspect of the discourse was the trend noted in the student outcomes indicating a student deficit in elaboration. Warm feedback highlighted growth of student work. For example, "In the first half of the essay, the writer includes good transition terms" and "The essay shows a good explanation that connected to the writer's point." Cool feedback emphasized areas of need for next steps. For instance, a teacher stated, "Although the writer has good ideas, I am unsure of what the writer is getting to as she has too much information here." Teachers noted the differences in length and quality of writing used to show the connections in the writing, and efforts in organization. While the team engaged in discussion on student work and identified a specific need, teachers were unclear on decisions regarding the selection of students for the focus group or how student essays revealed the learning gaps and the trends noted by teachers.
- Teacher teamwork begins with examining school data and student work, such as class work data by grade and pre-post tally charts throughout a unit of study in order to support a school goal to improve the work in unit refinements and student outcomes. Teachers also visit each other's classrooms periodically and fill out a form reflecting their visit. However, the school does not yet set aside sufficient time to intentionally engage teachers in sharing strategies and an in-depth study of the needs of students of focus.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

In a majority of classrooms, curricula and academic tasks are Common Core aligned and consistently encourage higher-order skills for a diversity of learners. Teachers use student work and data outcomes to refine tasks and units.

Impact

School leaders and staff use data analysis to make purposeful decisions around curricula that builds coherence across grades and subjects cognitively engages all students and promotes college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Planning teams have worked for the past two years designing and aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts to ensure that across grades and subject areas units of study represent the major work of the grade and demands of the standards. Units include several enduring understandings, essential questions, content, skills, embedded assessments, strategies, activities, standards, and resources.
- The school examined the ELA and math item skills analysis identifying areas needing adjustments in unit plans to attend to the needs of the students within each content area with a highlight on special education students and English language learners. Teachers revised an ELA grade 6 unit on argumentative writing by changing the essential question to facilitate comprehension. Additionally, teachers modified numerous passages to accommodate the needs of the school's particular subgroups, and to ensure uniformity and continuity throughout the unit. Such revisions include academic vocabulary, now included throughout the unit, as well as the use of scaffolds implemented and depicted in lesson plans. A grade 8 science lesson plan about living things incorporated scaffold "hint cards" which the teacher planned to use as needed upon assessment of student groups while circulating the groups. A quick assessment informs the teacher of the group status and then a hint card with an illustration and a question on the margin demonstrates the concept. One hint card illustrated an adult dog surrounded by its puppies and the question, "How are the dog and the puppies related?" The scientific concept was, "Living things reproduce and pass on their genes to another generation." Similarly, the teacher provided the students with various scaffolds designed with analogies and comparisons. Math refinements include rubrics, post assessments and performance tasks that further align with each unit and grade. Revised curriculum maps and pacing calendars in all content areas note instructional adjustments.
- A needs assessment informed curricular revisions in an English as a second language unit to include specific scaffolds. Second language, special education and content area teachers worked together to inform those adjustments that highlight academic vocabulary and guiding questions. Teachers continue to focus on planning more opportunities on the use of new skills introduced across subject areas. A review of units indicate revisions made provide a variety of scaffolds, including question scaffolds and a school-wide initiative on explicit instruction in the area of academic vocabulary.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms the use of teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reveal a shared set of beliefs around how students learn best that provides consistent instructional support, including appropriate scaffolds and the use of questioning and discussion techniques that engage all learners.

Impact

The school's emphasis on increasing student engagement leveraged by the Danielson Framework for Teaching is strengthening strategies and techniques being implemented at the classroom level that promote high levels of student thinking and participation across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- The school community shares the belief in its school vision that all children, “Infused with academic language on a regular basis are more likely to succeed” and learn best “when they are provided with a safe, stress free environment, where students want to learn and are able to ask questions, reflect and discuss their learning.” This belief was evident in most classrooms that included resources such as support charts, word walls, and academic vocabulary. A sample is a chart that explains sentence structure as follows: “It’s all about that base” identifying whom or what as the subject and what the subject is doing as the predicate in a familiar song chant teens are able to remember. Additionally, a chart captures author’s purpose as PIE meaning P to persuade, I to inform which is to teach, and E to entertain or hold the audience’s attention. Numerous charts created by teachers and students were noted and students referred to them as needed.
- Students consistently worked in groups on activities that included scaffolds to support their understanding of the lesson’s goal. In a grade 8 science lesson, students working on a dichotomous key watched and listened as the teacher used the SMART board to project a variety of images of numerous organisms. Student input guided the teacher’s movement and categorization of the images into boxes. The teacher then directed students to come up with key questions helpful to sorting organisms using a dichotomous key. During the work period, students followed a procedure to inspect the model organisms, which were small, plastic animals, as they designed and recorded questions on a data table, placed them into box A, or moved them to box B or C. The procedure continued, concluding with a prediction prompted by an open-ended question asking students to identify the two most closely related organisms and to explain their answers. Some groups used a scaffold that showed a systematic procedure, others had a scaffold with helpful vocabulary, yet another group had a Spanish translation of the procedure. Similar observations were evident in the majority of classrooms visited.
- In a grade 6 integrated co-teaching math class, student groups working on algebraic expressions used handouts, index cards, and highlighters and discussed steps to match the cards. Each algebraic expression card had a matching verbal expression card. Students identified which card best represented the card they each had. One card read, “seven less than a given number” while the matching card read, “ $P-7$ ”. Another read “The quotient of 59 and w ” with a matching card, “ $59 \div w$ ”. Students then answered open-ended questions, such as, “When would you use algebraic expressions in the real world?” and “Identify the key expressions that helped you to find the match.” Some students had yellow sheets with illustrated math symbols and matching vocabulary, others a think-pair-share activity where students wrote algebraic expressions and the matching verbal expressions.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers and school leaders consistently use common assessments aligned to curricula in all subjects and track student progress toward goals informing curricular and instructional adjustments.

Impact

The school's use of assessment results to provide actionable feedback to students and teachers and monitor student achievement is resulting in instructional adjustments that meet the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers identify Common Core Learning Standards within each unit of study and design pre and post assessments that measure those standards. Baseline data outcomes drive the school's instructional adjustments and inform pacing calendars across subject areas and grades. A grade 7 math performance assessment calendar indicates that during the month of September, teachers administered a baseline and during subsequent months, they use unit assessments. Instruction in unit 3 during the month of March is on expressions and equations, concluding with a performance task. A science assessment calendar begins in September with a New York City performance exam and in later months, teachers assess student work to track progress via document-based questions and a science rubric. For instance, a grade 6 science rubric uses Levels 1 through 4 criteria to measure explanations of work, questions, hypothesis, planning investigations, design of procedures, evaluating explanations, and supporting a claim. Teachers use a common rubric across grades, content areas, and with all units. Although the criteria for the levels differ by content area, they all measure the same skills indicating the following on the rubric: "Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them, reason abstractly and quantifiably, construct a viable model, use tools strategically, attend to precision, and make use of structure". At the bottom of the rubric, teachers write next steps for students. ACHIEVE 3000 highlights the school focus on English language learners who use the online literacy adaptive system and move into higher levels at student pace of growth. Teachers use data to measure growth using a lexile framework or reading levels provided by ongoing at-a-glance reports.
- On demand writing prompts assess writing progress with pre, mid- and post- writing tasks to examine comprehension of writing genres throughout the school year. A grade 6 ELA mid-assessment requires that students independently demonstrate their understanding of the unit by reading the text, *Names/Nombres* and writing an essay that captures the central idea. Students use a planning page to jot down their thinking. The prompt also requires that the students include the title of the text, the author and the author's purpose with text evidence. They also incorporate a short summary of the text, restating the central idea, and use evidence from the text that proves the central idea and a conclusion restating key ideas. Students are also required to answer numerous open-ended questions at the end of the test, including "What information belongs in a summary?" and "How many pieces of evidence should be included to prove your central idea?"
- Teachers consistently provide feedback to students to push their thinking or as a next step. Examples of feedback to support student progress toward goals include, "Add another paragraph to further support your claim!" and "A thorough response, next, use other sentence starters when using text evidence, for example, 'According to the text...'"