



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The Christa McAuliffe School/I.S. 187**

**Middle School K187**

**1171 65<sup>th</sup> Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11219**

**Principal: Mr. Justin Berman**

**Date of review: December 9, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

## The School Context

The Christa McAuliffe School/I.S. 187 is middle school with 1,018 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 10% Black, 5% Hispanic, 23% White, and 70% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 98.3%.

## School Quality Criteria

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

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness are communicated and supported by students, staff, parents, and school leaders.

### Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability for high expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- Ninety percent of eighth-grade graduating students were accepted to specialized high schools. When students were asked how high school would be different than middle school, replies included: “There will be more responsibilities for you to do...procrastination was a big thing in elementary and middle school, but it can’t be in high school;” “We will not be with the same people all day as we are now...traveling with the same class;” “It will be more difficult...that’s why we’re focusing on personal improvement;” and “The way teachers teach will be different and we will need to adapt to it.”
- For each marking period and class, students selected goals which they perceived to be most challenging for them, with the understanding that all goals should be worked on and completed by the end of the marking period. Parents sign off on these goals. One student’s goals for the second marking period were, “I will (a) be able to graph and solve exponential functions (Algebra); (b) participate in a variety of collaborative grade appropriate discussions English language arts (ELA); (c) understand the main features of the periodic table and their importance for classifying elements with 90% accuracy (Science); (d) formulate speaking volume appropriate and clear responses in the target language 90% of the time (Spanish); (e) improve my Fitnessgram score for the curl-up assessment (physical education); and (f) read and understand half and whole notes with 95% accuracy (keyboarding).”
- “Our entire self-contained special education population is at the center of what we do,” said Principal Berman. “To me that means a lot...they’re not in the basement or squirreled away somewhere.” Our 12-month assistant principal spends the summer meeting with students and their families to make sure we have the programs they want. She meets with every child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to go over goals, what they’re concerned about, and who they’ll meet when they get off the bus the first day. It’s important for our special education students to know that they’re with us. The star of our chorus performances was a student with pervasive disabilities.”
- “It’s the special courses in each academy that engage students, like the sports medicine, civil engineering, finance, and law courses,” said Principal Berman. “Our goal is to make sure that kids leave this school with a love of learning. It’s the academy structure that allows students to be known by teachers.” The school even has a student-run, “Kids Coffee Shop,” where menu items like soup, baked potatoes, and sandwiches are available. With help from careerkids.com, students in the food preparation class developed resumes reflecting their qualifications to serve as merchandisers, cooks, coffee servers, and chocolate makers, including their abilities, talents, achievements, awards, experience and education.

## Area of Focus

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

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership is embedded within the school's systems and structures.

### Impact

Professional collaborations have resulted in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. There is effective teacher leadership and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Wednesdays have been designated as "Department Days," during which teachers work collaboratively with their teams. Teacher teams identified students performing at the lowest third of the school's student achievement data and then engaged in refining and revising the curricula. When looking at student work, teachers use a "Modified Tuning Protocol" (adapted from *Looking Together at Student Work* by Blythe, Allen, & Powell, New York: Teachers College Press, 1999). "The teacher teams have been important vehicles for coherency," says Principal Berman.
- Tuesdays have been designed as a "Day of Exploration" for teachers, during which teachers are free to pursue an area of professional learning, often aligned to Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. During meetings of the school's Instructional & Professional Enrichment Team, teachers engage in planning peer-to-peer professional learning for the entire staff. Results of a professional enrichment teacher survey reflected teacher interest in improving their technology skills. Teacher teams were designed to enable peer experts to share their expertise. For example, two teachers presented to peers on the use of Google Drive, a file storage and synchronization service which would enable teachers to share samples of interdisciplinary projects that students have completed. Also shared by two teachers was a rubric made using the free online tool called *RubiStar*, which students used to create timelines and flow charts for a technology-rich project entitled, "The history of and contributors to the discovery of cells and modern day cell theory."
- Principal Berman shared the following email he received from a teacher who attended a recent professional learning session conducted by a peer: "I participated in the Class 608 professional learning session which I felt was very beneficial. The teacher did a fantastic job explaining some of the reasons behind the behavioral issues and learning disabilities of students in that class. She provided some interesting and quick techniques to use with individual students when they are off task and need a break...it was a very positive session because we've all had similar experiences with students. Awareness of the reasons behind the problem made us all more understanding of their needs...and changed the way I saw different students and gave me some techniques to respond to them."
- "Lead Teachers keep everyone on track and make sure everyone is involved," said Principal Berman. Lead Teachers were identified as a result of a needs assessment survey that captured areas of practice that teachers felt comfortable with. They work closely with the on-site UFT Teacher Center. We also have coaches and teachers who serve as programmers."

## Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

### Impact

There is coherence across grades and subject areas promoting college and career readiness for all students. All learners, including students with special educational needs, must demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- “We’ve been designing our own curriculum since we opened,” said a teacher. Teachers and administrators agreed that the *Expeditionary Learning* (EL) program chosen initially by the school was not rigorous enough for their students in ELA. A decision was made to replace EL with the *Institute for Learning* (IFL) program in November 2013. “With IFL, we saw that the lessons are focused on thinking skills, not just on the right answer,” said Principal Berman. A decision was also made to continue to use Scholastic’s *CODE X™* program, especially for students in self-contained classes. *Connected Mathematics Project 3* (CMP3) was also replaced by a mixture of teacher-created curricular units of study and *GO Math!™* as well as *Carnegie Learning* for algebra in grade 8. The school deemed these new curricula choices to be more aligned with the Common Core, as well as student and pedagogical needs.
- The school has integrated the instructional shifts in the selection of authentic non-fiction texts, with a focus on classic novels, such as Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” and Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird.” “There has been a shift from individual academic tasks to more meaningful group work with opportunities for student-to-student dialogue and accountable talk,” said Principal Berman.
- Close reading of text was evident in a science class engaged in a lesson about how fossil evidence found in sedimentary rock can be used to study past climates and environments. Through a review of the “Fossils of NY” resource guide, their reading of Robert Krulwich’s article “Mastodon’s in Manhattan: A Botanical Puzzle,” and a discussion of German meteorologist Alfred Wegener’s 1912 Theory of Continental Drift, students were able to understand how scientists use fossils to study prehistoric environments.
- Real-world experiences are effectively incorporated within the curriculum. For example, pairs of eighth-grade students in the school’s civil engineering class presented to their peers on the civil engineering aspects of famous construction projects worldwide. Students designed PowerPoint presentation on such construction projects as the Capital Gate in Abu Dhabi, Dubai—certified by Guinness World Records as the furthest leaning man-made tower, and China’s Shanghai Tower in Lujiazui, Pudong, Shanghai. In a law class, students discussed Mayor de Blasio’s policy prohibiting city employees from accepting holiday gifts. Discussion questions included, “Who is the Mayor trying to protect?” “How does the Mayor’s policy conflict with either the students’ or teachers’ Constitutional rights?” and “Will you be giving your teacher(s) a gift regardless of the Mayor’s policy?”

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

### Impact

All learners, including students with disabilities (SWDs), are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus is on questioning and discussion techniques. Following the review of data, teachers determined that students struggled with various multiple choice question types. In response, the goals of a lesson in a seventh-grade ICT class were (a) to emphasize that asking questions in response to a text is a college and career readiness skill, and (b) that asking/creating questions helps students monitor their comprehension of texts. First, students defined different vocabulary words from the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) model and briefly discussed their thoughts on why the skills were important in school and life. Then, students engaged in a gallery walk of questions charted by fellow students in response to the text. During this gallery walk, students commented on the DOK level of the questions and offered constructive feedback to their peers using Post-Its.
- A lesson plan for a class reading Arthur Miller's play "The Crucible" describes how the teacher will ensure that all students have access to and are able to engage in the lesson. For this lesson, SWD and English language learner (ELL) students were provided with bulleted notes for Acts I-III of this play as well as a handout with modified background information for use as a scaffold. Key information and terms were in bold for emphasis and fonts were larger for students below grade level and dyslexic students. ELL students shared, "I came to this country in the third grade. We speak English here but I speak Chinese with my friends. It helps you improve when you converse with other people;" "People help you see the other side of an issue with interesting arguments that are well thought out. It's also helpful when people point out mistakes;" and "I like working in groups...I can connect with people who are also excelling in knowledge and it improves our ability to work with other people." "A lot of our students come in speaking other languages...we translate everything," said Principal Berman. "I do a weekly phone message that I record, and then others record it in Cantonese and Mandarin."
- Eighth-grade students closely viewed the 10-minute documentary film, "The Los Angeles Riots—1992 Civil Unrest" in their ELA class and took guided notes on a graphic organizer about the film. Students in this ICT class had previously read both "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee and an essay about the character Tom Robinson downloaded from directessays.com. Questions for note taking included: "What was Los Angeles like before/after the 1992 riots?" "What were the actions, reactions, and attitudes of gangs, store owners, residents, government officials, Rodney King, Atticus, and you?" "In what ways do the communities of real life Los Angeles and New York mirror that of fictional Alabama 1930s—as described in "To Kill A Mockingbird?" "What does it mean that in 1935, there was indirect racism and now its direct?" Addressing this last question, a student responded, "It's complicated. Back then it wasn't informed." The teacher responded with a question, "What does the word indirect mean?" The student's answer, "It's not in your face."

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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## Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers track progress and adjust curricula using assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned with the school's curricula. These pedagogical practices offer a clear portrait of student mastery and create a clear picture of student progress towards goals across grades and subjects.

## Impact

Actionable and meaningful feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. In response, teachers are able to make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs. All students have demonstrated increased mastery and are aware of their next learning steps.

## Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics that are aligned to the task function diagnostically to give teachers and students a picture of the learning targets being assessed. For example, the aim of an eighth-grade mathematics lesson was "To create, solve, and understand the meaning of the solution for a system of equations." The following scenario was provided to the class: "Rita joined the Venus Gym with no initial fee and a monthly charge of \$25. Robert joined the Mars Gym with an initial fee of \$60 and a monthly fee of \$10. How can you represent the situation using functions? How many equations and why?" Students used a rubric for self assessment and peer assessment. The rubric detailed the grading guidelines for this project, using specific language of the task to assess the student's computational and conceptual understanding, as well as presentation. "Unpacking the rubric is what teachers do for students and students are involved in reframing the rubric to make it more challenging," said Principal Berman.
- Teachers provide students with written feedback that affirms specific successes and areas that students need to continue to work on. For example, an eighth-grade mathematics teacher's descriptive commentaries on an exponential growth task to eighth-grade students were as follows: "Your explanations are wonderful. A person can understand how compound interest works. The only place you are confused with is how long it takes to pay the item off. By changing the exponent to 365, you do not take into account the smaller balances each month." Students shared that they know how well they are doing in school "...by (a) report cards; (b) when a teacher picks you to present; (c) when they receive feedback from the teacher; (d) from scores on the web-based "Edline" tool (now called Blackboard Engage™); and (e) the number of mistakes you make, and not making the same mistakes." Students provide feedback through pre-assessments, reflection logs and exit tickets that enable teachers to assess student understanding by having them summarize key points from the lesson.
- FileMaker® Pro growth reports and Scantron's *Prosper*® *Assessment System* are used to analyze test results and to access targeted information for planning groups and tailoring instruction. Data used in the interpretation of progress includes item skill analyses, and interim assessments. Supplemental programs with embedded assessments are used, like *Ten Marks Math*, *Discovery Education*™ (United Streaming), TEST READY® PLUS Math, *TeenBiz3000*®, and *Achieve3000*®. "We're very non-test prep and so we're very selective in what we purchase," said teachers assessing the Ready® NY Common Core program.