



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Meyer Levin School for the Performing Arts**

**Middle School K285**

**5909 Beverley Road  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: Frederick Underwood**

**Date of review: December 10, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins**

## The School Context

Meyer Levin School for the Performing Arts is a middle school with 813 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 96% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.0%.

## 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>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Proficient</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>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards with emphasis on instructional shifts. Coherently planned and refined units of study promote higher order thinking skills for all students across grades and subjects.

### Impact

Academic tasks provide opportunities for all students to reinforce knowledge and skills across disciplines in preparation for college and career aspirations.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers develop a trans-disciplinary curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and citywide instructional shifts. A focus on text-based citations, writing from multiple sources, fluency in mathematical operations, and conceptual applications across context areas, enable student access and skill development across the curriculum to make real world connections and challenge their thinking. For example, seventh grade students studying the Colonial Era and the American Revolution analyze and explain a quote via a quick write. Students justify their thinking in a written discussion of a quote from Common Sense by Thomas Paine, *“The pen is mightier than the sword”*. Students cite evidence from the article to support either the patriot or loyalist’s position. Similarly, in a seventh grade math class, students solve multi-step word problems to demonstrate understanding of unit rates by designing a menu and choosing a physical activity that will burn off calories per minute given variables of height and weight. Working with an assigned partner, all students were cognitively engaged.
- Teachers use student work products to refine curricula and tasks such as incorporating a grade-level skill of the week based on data analysis. Curriculums support appropriate engagement for all students through extensions of units, modified performance tasks, differentiated strategies, and rearrangement of the sequence of units and topics in English language arts (ELA) and math classrooms. This practice of frontloading specific content such as operations with integers and citing textual evidence allows students to practice rigorous skills and higher order thinking. Lesson plans and units of study indicate necessary scaffolds to engage a diversity of learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities. Prior exposure to key vocabulary, the identification of students’ common misconceptions, and reference to problems of practice with clearly delineated revisions in plans and units ensure deficiencies in academic skills are addressed.
- This year, the school creates trans-disciplinary units to enhance content learning through investigations. Scholastic Code X and Go Math! programs coupled with four-week standard-based units on survival, nutrition, and transportation afford students opportunities to exercise critical thinking skills through cognitive engagements that foster problem solving, creativity, and skill development. For instance, sixth graders study natural disasters using the lens of a scientist to study concepts pertaining to weather and its impact on the earth’s atmosphere. Seventh graders delve into a unit on nutrition to study the history of America’s food supply from Jamestown to present day with a focus on calorie consumption and health. Eighth graders examine the history of public transportation in our nation to evaluate the efficiency of transportation in East Flatbush today.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

The use of rubric-based assessment that engenders meaningful feedback to students is loosely aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers' assessment practices that reflect checks for understanding are inconsistent across classrooms.

### Impact

A clear picture of student learning outcomes at the school and classroom level is inhibited by the limited use of rubrics, lack of written feedback to students, and sporadic checks for understanding across classrooms.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers administer quizzes, unit assessments, performance tasks, exit slips, and homework to track progress and students' understanding of concepts. While there was evidence of school-wide use of common assessments such as pre-diagnostic and benchmark exams to track trends and patterns in student learning, the use of rubrics to monitor progress aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and to articulate actionable feedback to students is not a consistent teacher practice. The lack of this vital assessment practice was evident in a review of cumulative student work products inclusive of all subject areas and during interviews with students across grades. Recorded feedback from one ELA teacher specifically commented on the student's use of descriptive language to engage the reader while another ELA teacher writes, "You did fine work."
- Across classrooms and bulletin boards, teacher feedback on student work was limited and inconsistently based on the use of common rubrics. For instance, although student work on display in a seventh grade social studies classroom was graded, work did not reflect rubric-based feedback or teacher comment. Similarly, in a sixth grade Integrated Collaborative Team Teaching classroom, teachers grade student work using a numerical system and checkmarks, but do not provide written feedback. Although a three-point rubric is displayed on students' desk in a math classroom, work on display reflected the same teacher feedback even though grades differed.
- During class visits, some teachers were observed circulating around the room as students worked in groups asking questions to elicit explanations as well as providing additional support to those students engage in productive cognitive struggle. However, not all teachers employ a note-taking system, mid-lesson interruptions, or adjust lessons in the midst of instruction based on their observations such as challenge or ease during lessons. Two students out of six interviewed, reported they regularly engage in self and peer assessment practices.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Shared beliefs about how students learn best informed by the Danielson Framework aligns with curricula. Effective teaching strategies leverage critical thinking, collaborations, and scaffolds to engage all learners in purposeful tasks.

### Impact

Teacher thoughtful pedagogy results in varied entry points so that all learners have access to appropriately challenging tasks.

### Supporting Evidence

- Common pedagogical approaches and strategies were observed in the majority of classrooms visited. Student-to-student interactions, intentional grouping, small group discourse, and teachers emerging as facilitators of learning provide opportunities for all students to use academic language in evidence-based accountable talk lessons. School leaders monitor domain three of the Danielson Framework with a deliberate focus on teacher questioning and opportunities for students to engage in discussion.
- Students report that they assist each other in their learning and have opportunities to learn in interesting ways and use their creative minds. One student commented that not all students in a group are on the same level so they help each other because “*they are all good at something*”. An example of high level thinking and creative engagement was evidence in a sixth grade science lesson whereby students were required to identify the mathematical relationship between the number of half-life decays and absolute age of a fossil using their knowledge of carbon14, a radiocarbon dating method. Students jig-sawed an article, viewed a video, referenced a handout, and discussed their responses and calculations prior to a whole class share.
- A range of scaffolds to support students in a self-contained eighth grade class in their use of precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details and sensory language to capture action and convey experiences and events in writing – CCSS. ELA – Literacy. W.8.3d, was planned and modified so that all students engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. Teachers' strategic use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ensured students grouped according to their performance on a creative writing activity the day before had opportunity to be successful at a standards-based grade level writing activity. Multiple entry points to access a challenging task for students far below grade level comprised a close read of a power point on descriptive language; tiered tasks based on learning levels; choice of an activity which incorporated the trans-disciplinary unit on transportation; a Flocabulary video; and twenty minutes of guided practice which fostered active engagement in a writing lesson.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

### **Findings**

Articulated expectations create a culture for learning consistently supported by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Parents have access to varied opportunities to learn about school and class-level expectations for learning.

### **Impact**

Systems of accountability foster high expectations and promote professional growth and personal-academic development that prepare students for college and career pathways.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Rotation of cycles of observations by administrators provides all teachers with feedback on elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Need assessment surveys serve as a springboard for designing the school-wide professional development plan. Similarly, individual professional plans and teacher improvement plans outline goals, actions, activities, benchmarks, and a timeline of responsibilities aimed at achieving expectations for high-level professionalism and instruction.
- Established communication systems consistently message expectations for faculty, staff, students, and families. For example, the school uses a Light Emitting Diode (LED) to communicate daily expectations and events to those entering the school. Daily morning announcements by the principal, a shared Drop box utilized by teachers, telephonic communications, the *Bombardier* a school newspaper, and the turnkey of professional learning make transparent expectations that support a culture for learning.
- Parents report there is a growing use of Pupil Path, online reporting system, among teachers, which keep them informed of their children's progress and expectations for meeting grade-level standards. A sixth grade parent orientation, Parent-Teacher Association meetings, and the accessibility of the parent coordinator assist parents with their understanding of Common Core Learning Standards and expectations. Parents receive progress reports between marking periods to keep them apprised of student progress toward academic and personal goals.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	---	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

Teachers engage in professional collaborations structured around strengthening instructional practice and the deepening of Common Core Learning Standards work. The implementation of a teacher-leader initiative flourishes empowering teacher voice in key instructional decisions.

### Impact

Concerted efforts of teachers to expand curriculum development work toward school-wide goals hasten forward movement in teacher capacity, which has positive impact on student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- During a seventh grade teacher team meeting, content area teachers worked on the trans-disciplinary unit on nutrition to refine instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students in achieving the school-wide goal of proficiency in writing an argumentative essay. Teacher discourse in content specific groups followed by whole group conversations centered on the sharing of ideas on how to close gaps such as shifts in tasks, teacher assessments, and lesson development. This collaborative work was inclusive of targeted writing skills and strategies to raise levels of rigor and engagement. Refining complexity of tasks, decisions on appropriate graphic organizers, modes of teaching to address teacher practice are geared toward improved student learning.
- One teacher described teacher collaborations as a "check-in on colleagues" to see how their work is progressing. Facilitated by grade leaders, teacher team meetings generate collegial support that result in common practices such as more time spent on reading in class across subject areas so that students are able to write more fluently during quick writes, writing on demand tasks, and in their development of argumentative essays and narrative writing.
- The vertical team comprised of teacher leaders and teachers across general and special education programs use the Consultancy and Looking at Student work (LASW) protocols to make decisions on next steps in their school improvement work. Teachers interviewed agreed that their primary role and responsibility was to turnkey professional development, roll out school initiatives, relate feedback from colleagues to administrators and vice-versa, as well as examine student work and research instructional strategies and make necessary adjustments to curriculum. They noted that this "bottom-up, top-down" structure gives them voice and a platform for open dialogue to address concerns, issues, and best practices that strengthen instructional capacity. Teachers feel empowered assuming the responsibility for the professional growth of new teachers and their acclimation into the school community. Spearheading the writing of quality Individualized Educational Plans, participation in the Teacher Leadership Program, partners in Teacher College professional development offered by the network, and Cohort B inter-visitations as well as attendance at the Danielson Group training sessions leverage teachers being on the same page, common language, change in school culture, and open flexibility to learn and get better.