

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Margaret S. Douglas Junior High School**

**Middle School K292**

**301 Vermont Street  
Brooklyn NY  
11207**

**Principal: Evelyn Maxfield**

**Date of review: March 4, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

## The School Context

Margaret S. Douglas 19K292 is a junior high school with 694 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 57% Black, 31% Hispanic, 1% White, and 9% Asian students and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.0%.

## 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>Additional Findings</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>Focus</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

A shared vision has led to teacher team work that is systematic, data driven, inquiry based and targeted. Distributive leadership structures are embedded for effective teacher leadership.

### Impact

Teacher pedagogy and student outcomes are strengthened through effective teacher team work and leadership. Teachers have a key role in the decision making process resulting in a collaborative professional community.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher collaboration in subject area and grade level teams meet once per week for 90 minutes. The teams, as shown at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade math team meeting, examine student work and data and analyze outcomes to adjust curriculum units and lesson planning. The special education teacher is included in this meeting. Work is examined through the tuning protocol, which assesses strategies used, looks at student mastery and knowledge, and identifies trends and areas that still need remediation. There is also a math vertical team to look at structures and content challenges.
- Teachers revise curricula based on multiple sources of data that include, but are not limited to, the New York State English Language Assessment and math formative and summative scores, benchmark assessments, classroom observations and looking at student work. Teachers stated at both meetings that, “all teams work with data-driven goals to enhance pedagogy and increase student learning”. For instance, teachers analyze student work giving feedback for the next steps needed to inform instruction. Due to this extensive ongoing process, across grades, students engage in more accountable talk, formulate questions, engage in critical thinking and conversation, and student engagement in inquiry-based projects has increased.
- All teachers are engaged in an extensive teacher-led process of inter-visitations. Teachers give warm and cool feedback and share best practices while analyzing the impact and effectiveness of their own instruction. The schedule is set at team meetings. Teachers have created their own protocol for looking at work, set their own agenda and schedule meetings with the administration. This has created an open and collaborative space to ensure all team members that their work is aligned and the impact and effectiveness of their instruction extends to further planning that promotes rigorous objectives in lesson planning.
- Teachers engage in cycles of formal and informal observations and the Measure of Teacher Practice is embedded .in their feedback report. Teachers stated that all decision-making is shared and that distributive leadership structures have formed as a result of high expectations for students and a culture of professionalism. Lead teachers lead professional learning workshops, model lesson and have input on decisions toward the development of instructional resources across departments and grades. Teachers agreed that the leadership protocol has had a direct impact on their approaches to lesson planning with a focus on ways to actively engage students in their own learning.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms teaching is aligned to the curricula and reflects a coherent set of beliefs about student learning that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

### Impact

The alignment of pedagogy to curricula and the use of scaffolding and effective questioning strategies, along with scaffolding and multiple entry points, is provided but is not yet systematic, so that learners are engaged in challenging tasks in many, but not yet a vast majority of classrooms.

### Supporting Evidence

- The instructional focus of the school is aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts, focusing on embedding into units and lesson plans that emphasize text-based answers, writing from sources and citing evidence from text. In addition, academic vocabulary has been embedded into all instruction. In math the Common Core focus has been on deepening conceptual understanding, problem solving strategies, application, fluency and the use of mathematical vocabulary. This was seen in most, but not a vast majority of classroom visited. For example, in a grade 6 math class students knew the rituals and routines of raising hands, how to have a pair-share discussion, and were encouraged to use academic vocabulary. A few students dominated the discussions, and in this particular instance there were no checks for understanding. The students did work in pairs, but the work and interchange was limited with one student taking over the process and therefore limiting the opportunity for all students to participate.
- Teachers are using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) to extend lesson planning and student activities. Checks for understanding were used in most of the eight classes visited. Students were encouraged to collaborate with one another, often in small groups or pair/share discussions. Although in most classrooms whole group learning was limited, in the smaller groupings, extensions for higher performing students were not always in place. In these groups the stronger students often became peer mentors. While many teachers encouraged students to frame their own questions and respond to other students, there were instances of teachers serving as the leader and answering student questions instead of reframing and redirecting the questions to other students for discussion.
- The school has had an instructional focus on developing students' use of evidence to support arguments. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts (ELA) class visited was focused on encouraging inquiry and supporting their responses with textual evidence. The lesson had students as facilitators using big ideas and analyzing higher-level questions. There were multiply entry points, scaffolds and checks for understanding to determine which groups were succeeding and which were experiencing challenges. Students were using a clear rubric for short response and knew next steps in the process of evaluating the reading source. Teachers also make connections to the real world by explicitly connecting concepts to everyday experiences, and this has led to increased engagement, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> grade math class using the price of t-shirts individually versus buying three in a package and trying different processes to figure out not only the most financially responsible choice but how the answer was achieved.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are consistently emphasized for all learners across the grades and content areas.

### Impact

The school's curricula decisions build coherence and rigorous habits for all learners. Across grades and content areas, academic tasks push student thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school strategically aligns curricula to the Common Core, incorporating the instructional shifts and designing data informed tasks. The principal stated that work across vertical and horizontal teacher teams utilizes a wide array of Common Core and content standards, aligned curricula and teams are using a combination of Danielson and Webb's DOKs. Curricula across subject areas emphasize critical thinking, citing evidence and supporting a claim.
- Teachers use iReady and IXL for math, as well as EngageNY as a resource for strategies, exemplars, rubrics and analysis of Regents exam questions to ensure all curriculum tasks and assessments are aligned to Common Core and instructional shifts. This process yields curriculum maps, units of instruction and assessment rubrics that are aligned, plus critical thinking in writing and discussion across disciplines. There has been an extensive examination of student writing samples across grades and subjects including those of students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) and they are starting to demonstrate rigorous thinking through the use of evidence to formulate and defend argument and to justify thinking in math.
- Units plans presented along with lesson planning in all content areas emphasize higher order thinking skills and include rigorous academic tasks that include levels of questioning embedded into lesson plans creating more rigor in discussions and across the curriculum in writing skills. All curriculum binders included resources to ensure tasks are aligned to the instructional shifts. The result of the Middle School Quality Snapshot showed an overall gain in English and math over the city average with the school's lowest performing students making excellent gains. In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math class with general education students and students with disabilities, the teacher was clarifying X axis and axis movement. Students were in pairs reading directions and referring to vocabulary lists to write out the process in detail.
- Unit plans in all content areas illustrated multiple designs of academic tasks with numerous scaffolds and entry points for all learners and extensions for the advanced learner. Classes used visual, graphic organizers, colored card, numbered cards and leveled texts to support the more struggling learners.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

The school uses common assessments in all subjects, tracks student progress and adjusts curricula and instructional decisions. There are ongoing checks for understanding are aligned to school curricula and are used to drive instruction and push students to think critically.

### **Impact**

Teachers have identified foundational skills challenges in writing assessment through examination of student work, common assessments and using checks for understanding in lessons. Teachers are using targeted interventions various scaffolds and shared instructional planning to meet all students' learning needs.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Using data analysis from NY State English Language Arts and formative and summative math exam grades, iReady and benchmark assessments, teachers identified target areas of improvement that are in the curricula and reflected in unit plans. Teachers also use data from the School Survey assessments to develop interventions and supports in addition to formulating purposeful small groupings in classrooms. Teachers are using instructional techniques for check-ins such as questioning, feedback, rubrics, exit slips, medial summarizing of instruction, journal entries and share-outs.
- After examining student work at the team level, information is relayed to the larger professional learning community in order to use this data to refine, revise and determine next steps to meet the needs of all students. Teachers are adjusting curriculum in order to re-teach specific deficit skills to low performing students during small-group instruction and guided instruction.
- Student work is posted on bulletin boards and in folders; all have rubrics with actionable feedback. Teachers stated that they have checklists and conferencing notes to help identify who needs immediate attention with learning tasks during a lesson. Principal stated that, “teachers ensure rubrics and checklists are used as tools for assessment in instruction for all tasks and assignments.”
- Teachers monitor student progress during extra instructional times, such as early morning tutoring, after school programs, Saturday Academy and on-line tracking systems in order to adjust student groupings, resources for scaffolding and instruction strategies. Measures of Student Learning are used to monitor and support student learning. In addition, the school has an art program that emphasizes the well-rounded child, creating a “Respect For All” program. This program is reviewed and revised as needed to assist students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) in gaining confidence and developing self-esteem through the arts.

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for professionalism and instruction to the entire staff. Teachers establish a culture for learning that provides high expectations to all students and offers ongoing and detailed feedback.

### Impact

By communicating high expectations and creating a system of accountability for those expectations, the school has created a culture for learning that supports the academic growth of all students. Additionally, all students receive ongoing feedback and guidance supports that prepare them for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- As stated by the principal, “there are one-to one conferences, pre- and post-observations with actionable feedback to support instruction and high expectations of professionalism to the entire staff.” The school has a strong professional development community that emphasizes the importance of academic success through every day practices, also stated in the faculty and parent handbooks. There exists a parent orientation programs for incoming students, PTA meetings, and conferences, both formal and informal, with parents and consistent communication with parents and families.
- The school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan indicated that professional learning is organized around the Common Core and the Danielson Framework for Teaching, with an emphasis on their diverse population, including students with disabilities and ELLs as well as the general education students.
- Families indicated that they use Skedula, an online portal for communicating information, Parent surveys are sent home regularly to access needs, there are teacher emails and phone calls and many workshops including one on the school’s grading policy connecting to the new standards. Parents at the meeting also indicated knowledge of the high expectations of the administration, teachers and the curriculum, school vision and goals and active participation of two parents at the meeting on the School Leadership Team.
- Students shared that they are supported in their learning, and shared samples of the clear and explicit feedback they receive on their work. There is a “Man-Up” program for boys who have focused on their own progress and who are getting positive reviews on academic and social goals and skills. This is a reward system and it is making available special trips and projects to lower achieving students who are more motivated. There are also peer mentors across grades and within grades if needed.
- Students discussed the constant feedback that they receive and the two guidance counselors, along with the deans, who always have an open-door policy. Students receive monthly awards to affirm academic achievements. Performing arts programs are offered to students with interests and for social-emotional growth. Participants shared, “they feel supported and nurtured in this artistic environment” and the expectation is for them to become engaged, learners active in the world around them.