



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

School of Humanities

Middle School K347

**35 Starr Street
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: John Barbella, Ed.D.

**Date of review: May 13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Lillian Druck**

The School Context

School of Humanities is a middle school with 325 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 8% Black, 90% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.2%.

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	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Schools leaders convey high expectations to staff through the Danielson Framework for Teaching and professional learning sessions facilitated by internal staff and off-site training. Family engagement sessions help parents understand their children's progress in school and communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

Systems to support accountability for the principals' high expectations build commitment within the school community and promote an environment of learning and collaboration toward preparing students for future academic endeavors.

Supporting Evidence

- The school works with the Center for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE) to plan and deliver family workshops on topics such as the Common Core Learning Standards, preparing students for New York State assessments, creating a print-rich home to support students' academic success, and guidance with the high school application process. Teachers inform parents of student progress during parent teacher conferences and during Tuesday family engagement sessions. The parent coordinator works with the principal to offer workshops for parents who are new to the community and/or to the English language school system informing them of the school's expectations and of their children's progress in acquiring English language skills. For example, parents learn about the online adaptive program, myOn, which engages students at their level and moves them as they make progress in acquiring English language skills.
- The principal uses the Google docs system to share documents related to the school's expectations regarding professional responsibilities and instructional practices. For instance, the system allows for access to the school handbook, instructional strategies and rubrics to increase student-to-student discussion, which is the school's instructional focus. Lessons hosted by the math and the English language arts (ELA) demonstration teachers promote accountability in meeting the school's expectations. During a math lesson observed, the demonstration teacher implemented techniques to ensure that students effectively lead group discussions at various levels with one group using graphic organizers with annotations, another group following specific steps to solve word problems and a third group charting their collective responses to present to peers.
- Teachers engage in collaborative practices such as cycles of inter-visitations to observe instructional strategies in each other's classrooms. Following inter-visitations, teachers discuss the practices and strategies observed and how they plan to implement these in their classrooms. For example, teachers visited the ELA coach's classroom to observe how students use the "Look Who's Talking" rubric to improve student-to-student discussions in small groups and critique one another in agreement or disagreement across subject areas. The strategy is displayed in student friendly charts titled "Look Who's Talking." During department and grade level meetings, teachers engaged in dialogue about what worked well and what needed revisions, such as adding talk stems and conversation prompts to support the instructional focus on increasing student-to-student discussions. During the teacher team meeting, teachers commented that such practices promote accountability for the school's culture of high expectations.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

The use of entry points, questioning techniques, student work products, and discussions are at uneven levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

Across classrooms, the use of instructional strategies and scaffolds to prompt higher-order thinking and improve student learning is inconsistent, thus impeding a diversity of students from sharing their learning at high levels.

Supporting Evidence

- In some classes visited, resources such as experience charts, content and subject area word walls were available for student use. Some students were observed using support charts, scaffolds and visual aids. Scaffolds included worksheets with definitions and picture representations, chunked text with side-boxes that include a focus question, sentence starters, student-to-student discussion charts with an aligned rubric, calculators and manipulatives. Most students were seated in-group settings and in some classrooms, group-seating charts were posted. In spite of these efforts, classroom visits revealed levels of questions and scaffolds engaging only some students in grade level tasks.
- In an Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) class, students were asked to read a poem to continue to analyze structure between texts and make inferences about the narrator's thoughts. Numerous scaffolds with pictures or questions were provided for the students. However, students expressed minimal understanding of what they were asked to do. In one group students stated that their hand-out included words, definitions and pictures and their task was to use context clues to figure out the meaning of the word. Yet the handout already included definitions so students did not have to go to the poem to figure out the meaning of the words. Additionally, most of the words and definitions on the handout did not match the text in the poem. The word "fast" was defined as, "to not eat, the opposite of feast." The picture used as a representation was that of a burger and milkshake with a "do-not" sign. Yet the text read, "Feast, and your halls are crowded; fast, and the world goes by." Neither the picture or the text connected nor facilitated meaning for the group, and students expressed uncertainty as to what the author meant in that part of the stanza. Similar patterns were noted in other activities assigned to student groups.
- During a visit to a grade 7 math class learning about finding the area of composite figures, students were directed to work with their partners to complete an activity to find the area of an irregular shape. During the mini-lesson, the teacher modeled the steps and the procedures on how to find the area of composite figures and then prompted them into a discussion with questions and answers. However, discussions were mostly student-to-teacher and vice-versa with questions requiring yes or no responses remaining at knowledge-based or recall levels. Examples include "Based on your diagram, can the area of the garden be found in a way other than by multiplying the length by the width?" and "What is the current area of the garden?" Comparable use of questioning and tasks were seen in the majority of classes visited across content areas with minimal student-led conversations, teachers assuming the mediating role and remaining at the center of the discussion.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school ensures curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, makes purposeful decisions across the subject areas, and grades to integrate instructional shifts, consistently emphasizing rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

School-wide decisions on curricula and academic tasks build coherence across classrooms and promote deep reasoning, thus encouraging college and career preparation.

Supporting Evidence

- The *Expeditionary Learning* program is implemented across grades in ELA. Teachers incorporate the module units designed by themes and reading genres. All units include guiding questions and big ideas. For example in a grade 7 unit titled, *Journeys and Survival*, students are introduced to the concept of theme in a novel. While students read the text, *A Long Walk to Water*, the task indicates they are required to collect evidence from the text to answer the question, “How do individuals survive in challenging environments?” Moreover, students are required to read informational texts to support the context of the novel. The curricula reflects how students also engage in close readings of selected novels to support their preparation for mid and end of unit assessments which usually include a writing assessment via a literary analysis on writing about the theme of survival. Curricula also include content connections between ELA and social studies using literature and informational text, such as a unit about the second Sudanese civil war, which is an intentional interdisciplinary blend. Supporting targets depict “I can” statements in child-friendly language. In addition, units include ongoing assessments, anchor charts with strategies including the “Fist to Five” protocol where students indicate by fingers their level of understanding, and modifications like annotating and questioning.
- Teachers collectively review the Engage New York State modules to ensure that they are meeting students’ needs. They embed components of the Glencoe and GO Math! curricula with supports such as questions, scaffolds, and extensions in lesson plans. Also, teachers integrate questions and problems on a weekly basis as part of their classroom routines to promote participation and discussions. In addition, teachers’ lesson plans indicate the use of open-ended questions such as “How can we solve a given system using multiple methods?” and exit tickets to ensure that they are meeting lesson objectives.
- The school follows the social studies scope and sequence and incorporates writing standards in history via graphic organizers, vocabulary sheets, and guiding questions. A science unit includes an overview, task details, two performance tasks and a written assessment related to informative or explanatory texts. Units also require the use of scientific procedures, experiments, and technical processes as appropriate to the learning objectives. A review of curriculum maps indicates coherent units of study, which include essential questions, instructional skills, activities, standards, assessments, content, and differentiation. Science units require students to write reports describe the focus of their work, a hypothesis, and an investigation with five expected components. The components include independent, dependent, and constant variables, levels of independent variables and the number of repeated trials.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments, performance-based rubrics, and grading policies aligned to their curricula to gain a clear understanding of student progress toward goals.

Impact

Effective alignment of assessments to curricula, instructional adjustments, and actionable feedback provided across grades and subject areas lead towards the advancement of goals and increase student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a Monitoring and Revising template to support the process for adjusting curricula using student work and assessment data generated at the conclusion of each module or unit in the respective subject areas. Based on information gathered by teachers on the Monitoring and Revising ELA template for grade 7, specifically for the Expeditionary Learning module titled *Journeys and Survival*, English language learners demonstrated difficulty using context clues to identify the meaning of unknown words. The ELA team made adjustments to instruction by incorporating domain specific vocabulary definitions and visuals, and by reinforcing the “Good Readers” strategy. During class visits, students were observed using a strategy, which required them to annotate and highlight context clues while reading to gain a better understanding of unfamiliar vocabulary, and improved comprehension of the assigned text.
- English language arts teachers use Action Planning Organizers to gather feedback regarding student achievement and make databased instructional adjustments. Summative assessment item analysis data indicated that 45% of grade 7 students were able to determine two or more central ideas in a text and explain how the ideas were conveyed through particular details within the text. These results prompted the grade level team to adjust their weekly curriculum maps by incorporating multiple opportunities for students to analyze and evaluate varied summaries of the same text and to write their own summaries using graphic organizers.
- Teachers use a data tracker online system to gather and track student results in meeting benchmarks tied to yearlong assessments and Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) assessments in ELA. Teachers also administer post unit Expeditionary Learning assessments to measure student progress and achievement toward meeting grade benchmarks. The data generated from the base and midline assessments and from the myOn online reading program provides feedback to teachers regarding student achievement in reading and informs students of their performance following the completion of assigned tasks.
- During the small group meeting, students shared feedback provided by teachers using the argument writing evaluation rubric attached to their work, which included checkmarks indicating what they were doing well in writing. The rubric focused on the content and analysis of ideas and information, use of evidence to support analysis and reflection, coherence and organization of ideas, and command of English language conventions, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Some student work also included feedback on post-it notes such as “Continue to work on using strong vocabulary”, “Remember to use relevant evidence from both texts” and “Present counter arguments.”

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

The majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based, common planning sessions to support curricular alignment with the Common Core Standards across grade levels. Teacher teams examine student work and analyze assessment data of subgroups, including students with disabilities, English language learners and other high needs subgroups.

Impact

The school's professional collaborations foster teacher reflection, improve instructional capacity and lead to identifying effective classroom strategies that focus on increasing student learning outcomes and promoting the school's goals.

Supporting Evidence

- The ELA grade-level teacher teams meet weekly to examine the work of students in the school's lowest third, plan lessons, and modify the curriculum based on data surfaced during inquiry meetings. A consultant from Teaching Matters meets twice a month with the team to analyze data trends captured in the school's data tracker. For example, the ELA team reports that based on data trends from summative assessments, end of unit expository writing, Lexile levels and MOSL results, students across grades have made consistent progress in using text based evidence in their writing but continue to struggle in analyzing evidence to support their claims. Based on the monitoring of Lexile levels, the team determined that grade 8 students are reading on or close to their grade-level bands and that grades 6 and 7 students were not showing consistent progress in advancing from one level to the next. The math teacher team creates assessments that focus on grade specific content standards, examining student work to provide insights about teaching practices and reviewing item analysis data to identify common trends and misconceptions.
- Teacher teams upload documents on Google docs including agendas, minutes and student data so that all teachers have access to the work produced by the various professional collaborations across the school, including the ELA, math and arts/social studies interdisciplinary teams. Teams refer to binders of instructional strategies such as gallery walk protocols, note-catchers, and think-group-share graphic organizers, to help strengthen their lessons. Teacher teams also created a survey titled, "Four Eyes and Ears are Better than Two, Wouldn't You Agree?" to further encourage inter-visitations and learn from each other. At one of the team meetings, a teacher stated, "inter-visitations, discussion of low inference notes and ongoing professional dialogue will lead us toward a culture of self-reflection and further strengthen our classroom practices."
- During the ELA grade team meeting, teachers used the tuning protocol from *The Power of Protocols* by Joseph McDonald, to examine student essays produced at the end of an Expeditionary Learning unit. The team's focus was on how well target students were citing text evidence. Teachers provided warm and cool feedback, which included comments on the structure, introduction, body, and conclusion of the writing piece. Weaknesses such as confusing topic sentences and claims loosely backed up with sound reasoning engaged the team in identifying next steps in their practice to improve the progress of target students in meeting their learning goals in writing. For example, the team decided to provide students with model essays that highlight clear claims supported by relevant evidence, graphic organizers to help outline ideas and sentence starters to assist with topic sentences.