



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Middle School for Art and Philosophy

Middle School K588

**1084 Lenox Road
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Neil J. McNeill, Jr.

**Date of review: January 22, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins**

The School Context

Middle School for Art and Philosophy is a middle school with 252 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 89% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 22% 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 92.0%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	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	Additional Findings	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across grades and content areas, curricula are strategically aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and promote college and career readiness via integration of the instructional shifts. Performance tasks emphasize rigorous habits and high-order skills in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact

Performance tasks emphasize rigorous habits and high-order skills so that all learners have opportunity to demonstrate their thinking, which promotes college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps and units of study align conceptual themes across disciplines. Maps integrate previously used resources such as Scholastic Code X for English language arts (ELA) and Pearson's Connected Mathematics Project 3. Opportunities for students to apply and transfer content knowledge across subjects are evident in lesson objectives that connect learning targets and conceptual understandings. Curricula alignment supports learning progressions. In a bridge special education lesson, the design provides students an opportunity to engage in an activity on the rebirth of immigration. Similarly, a sixth grade ELA lesson, explores conditions that affect communities. The concept of *interaction* across grades and subjects fosters the broader goal of curricula coherence.
- Rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills are embedded in common performance tasks that tie in specific skills in all subjects assisting students in transferring skills to the next level of learning or to the other subjects. Instructional planning builds concepts from basic understandings to complex applications. An example of this work is the conceptual theme of *interaction* in the ELA curricula that was evident across programs and grades. In a sixth grade Integrated Collaborative Team (ICT) lesson, a sixth grade general education lesson and a seventh grade lesson are designed to engage students in activities that required them to either identify the main idea, support claims using text-based evidence, or write a summary of an article that presented negative and positive actions and reactions. Circular curriculum to meet rigorous expectations embeds the spiraling of opportunities for students to engage in analyzing text-based evidence, justifying reasoning and claims, as well as measuring accuracy in math using a standards-based checklist.
- All teachers include a range of strategies in the development of curriculum such as task rotations, reading for meaning, and engaging all students in rigorous content and high-order thinking skills. All students use a mnemonic technique called "RACE, Restate the question, Answer completely, Cite textual evidence, Explain how the evidence supports your answer or provide examples" to demonstrate proficiency in writing.
- The school implemented learning progressions in short-response writing to ramp-up requisite skills based on need and current level of performance. Units of study contain skill-specific learning progressions across middle school grade bands. Smaller steps for reaching learning targets promote self-regulation and organizational skills, which are academic behaviors associated with college and career readiness. Progressions in writing ensure students meet the demands of anchor standards (W.CCR. 1, 2, and 3).

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The delivery of instruction and pedagogical approaches reflects the school's belief about how students learn best. Across classrooms, multiple entry points, based on interest, needs, and modes, support learning progressions in the curricula.

Impact

The use of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts undergird the belief system and pedagogy. In some classrooms, access to entry points that incorporate strategic use of resources, high-quality supports, and extensions to elevate engagement in appropriately challenging tasks limits learners to maximize demonstration of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's core beliefs about student learning focus on increasing rigor in order to prepare students for high school as well as promote college and career readiness. Teacher facilitation, task rotation, purposeful use of exit and entrance tickets and Common Core Standards-based tasks are aligned to articulated beliefs about best practices, as expressed by the principal. These practices of engaging students in learning are in keeping with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and citywide instructional shifts. For example, during a seventh grade math lesson, students were observed working in small groups to assist their peers with making corrections to a previous assignment. The use of an exit ticket in an eighth grade math class, allowed students to think about why it makes sense to complete the mathematical process when describing the properties of translation and the effect on congruence and orientation of figures. Subsequently, students shared their thinking and defended their work.
- In most classrooms, students demonstrated knowledge of more than one skill in order to complete an assigned task. Although students in classrooms were grouped by ability, the mode of engagement was the same for all students. Namely, there was limited use of technology by students, a lack of opportunity for students to express learning through varied modalities, and enrichment activities were uneven across classrooms. An example of this would be seatwork with pencil and paper as the primary tools for demonstrating learning across most classes.
- On the other hand, in a seventh grade Integrated Collaborative Teaching classroom, students worked in stations based on teachers' review of a previous assessment. Flexible grouping included opportunities for students to deepen conceptual understanding of unit rate during a math lesson. Students worked in small groups to practice a skill, correct problems, use manipulatives, draw, explain in writing, defend their work or they received direct instruction. However, this high level of differentiated instruction that scaffolds, optimizes, and enriches opportunities to demonstrate learning is not yet evident in the vast majority of classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

The use of common assessments and grading policies are aligned across classrooms. Teachers and students use checks for understanding to assess learning and needs.

Impact

Student progress is monitored resulting in actionable feedback and adjustments to curricula and instruction based on learning outcomes. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) pre-assessments mid-term benchmark assessments, and common assessments delivered across classrooms are reviewed, shared, and discussed during department team meetings. Consistent uses of formative and summative assessments strengthen teacher understandings of learning needs. Teachers analyze student work, individually and collaboratively, to adjust their lessons. One such instance described by teachers spoke to how the lesson was tweaked based on the discovery that complex vocabulary impeded comprehension. To that end, teachers incorporated frontloading of vocabulary into lessons across disciplines.
- A trait-by-trait item skill analyses enhances teachers' ability to provide students with actionable feedback regarding achievement. Teachers provide specific steps within four learning progressions to convey clear and specific goals aligned to rubric-based standards. Learning targets include identifying key details, making a claim, supporting a claim with evidence, and paraphrasing.
- Teachers and students use a variety of strategies to check for understanding and to encourage participation during lessons. Teachers utilize techniques such as cold calling, popsicle sticks, thumb-up/down, check-ins, desk cards, turn-and-talk, passing the ball, and peer- and self-assessments. Teacher use of entrance and exit slips to modify instruction was observed during classroom visits. The use of an entrance ticket allowed an ELA teacher to assess students' thinking prior to sending them off for independent work. Students were asked to respond to the question, "What steps do you need to take to get this work done today?" A quick review of responses resulted in the teacher adjusting groups and reassigning group tasks.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Principal communicates high expectations to the entire staff aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Teachers and administrators utilize a variety of systems to communicate consistently high expectations and connections to college and career readiness to parents.

Impact

Clearly communicated high expectations foster systems of accountability and collaborations focused on student progress and collaborate with them in achieving progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations for professionalism and professional learning shared with teachers via various modes of communication clearly define that which staff and students are held accountable. Handbooks outlining rights and responsibilities, as well as important procedures, promote a culture of high expectations. Daily announcements, weekly memos, professional learning opportunities, a distributed leadership model, the Professional Learning Locker and Curriculum Lockers, a depository of professional learning resources housed on the school's website, hold teachers accountable for their professional behaviors. This system of accountability for instructional and pedagogical expectations enables access to items aligned to the instructional focus, PowerPoint presentations created from professional learning sessions, notes from professional readings, and Danielson *Framework for Teaching* resources.
- The principal's feedback to teachers, anchored in Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, ensures clarity and transparency in personalized, professional goal setting that reinforces school-wide instructional expectations and supports tailored professional development to build capacity toward high quality teaching and learning. Based on teachers' need and interest, faculty engages in group book clubs. *Better Learning through Structured Teaching* and *Learning in the Fast Lane* are among texts used as training tools.
- During the parent interview, families unanimously agreed that the school has high expectations for their children's success and supports them and their children in achieving high standards. Parents spoke favorably about the school working to get students to the top tier. For instance, parents reported that paths for college and career are evident in reading assignments that require students to dig deeper into texts to discuss current issues while learning about historical events. In addition, workshops on understanding Common Core help families understand paths to success in and beyond high school.
- The use of the Jupiter online grading system, progress reports, and communications through emails, text messages, or phone calls keep parents apprised of student progress. Students receive ongoing verbal and written feedback from teachers to help them meet learning targets.

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers engage in professional collaborations focused on strengthening their instructional capacity, implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Distributive leadership structures are effectively embedded.

Impact

Professional collaborations result in teachers sharing their repertoire of practices to improve teacher capacity, student learning, as well as, improving student achievement. Woven into the school’s fabric is distributed leadership, whereby teachers share responsibility in key decisions that affect learning across the school

Supporting Evidence

- The development of teacher leaders, through the Teacher Incentive Fund Grant (TIF) and school-level Teacher Leadership Team has created model teachers for others to emulate. Through this distributive model, teachers have assumed greater responsibility for the direction of the school. Peer Instructional Coaches target support to individual teachers. Demonstration Teachers open their classrooms via a public schedule to demonstrate instructional strategies and facilitate weekly professional learning sessions as well as lead teacher team meetings. Co-teaching supports the strengthening of capacity and fosters deeper understanding of content. Two Peer Instructional Coaches and three Demonstration Teachers serve as ambassadors that turnkey outside professional learning, as well as plan and facilitate professional learning.
- Teachers sit on a variety of teacher teams, which function inter-disciplinarily by grade and department. During these meetings, teachers use an inquiry approach to improve coherence in instruction. For instance, teachers roll out units of study, chunk units, and lessons to align with the Common Core, and research resources purposefully to improve student outcomes across the school.
- Teams use protocols to collectively celebrate forward movement in teaching and learning. Teachers begin collaborations by sharing observations and noticings. For example, one teacher shared students transferring learning-making connections to other classes, while another described students sharing strategies. Finally, another teacher described students as, "talking about their progress as captains of their own ships".