



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Van Siclen Community

Middle School K654

**800 Van Siclen Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207**

Principal: Adonna McFarland

**Date of review: May 4, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Luz T. Cortazzo**

The School Context

Van Siclen Community is a middle school with 213 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 63% Black, 34% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 31% 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

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	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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:	Well Developed
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Findings

High expectations are systematically conveyed to the entire school community, including teachers, students, and parents, through timely on-going communication, and delivery of effective feedback and guidance supports. School leaders consistently provide training to support the elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Structures that support high expectations assure a culture of mutual accountability among staff members. As a result of teacher teams' and staff members' critical interventions and on-going provision of feedback and advisement, students have ownership over their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Students benefit and persevere from strong partnerships with teachers and all members of the school community who consider academic success and performance of learners their central mission. "Morning Meets" and advisories are included in the students' programs utilizing the "Overcoming Obstacles", a life skills curriculum. The advisory class meets three times per week and is used to provide students an opportunity to learn skills like communicating effectively, making sound decisions, setting and achieving goals, job and career choices, and resolving conflicts.
- Every Wednesday morning, students are engaged in "talent time" through the arts and college and career readiness programs while staff spend the morning discussing data, collaborating with each other and engaging in professional development activities.
- The student/parent handbook and monthly newsletter, and the regular use of Danielson's Framework for Teaching, reinforce school-wide expectations for teaching and culture.
- Teacher teams have set high expectations for student feedback, within all subgroups, and have created student friendly rubrics and student reflection sheets that hold students accountable for review of their work, specific next steps, and timely follow up planning. Similarly, students give teachers feedback on established criteria. For example, in the music classroom visit, students rated the teacher performance using a performance rubric, upon the criteria of tone, accuracy, tempo, rhythm, posture, and articulation using the provided rubric.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Though pedagogy, anchored in common beliefs, provides consistent instructional supports, including scaffolds and questioning, the use of strategic extensions that foster higher order thinking demonstrated in rigorous student work and discussions varies across classrooms.

Impact

Across classrooms, multiple entry points support student engagement in rigorous tasks; however, supports and extensions are not always strategically planned so that all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), have opportunities to be highly engaged and demonstrate critical and analytical thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across all classrooms there was evidence of clear learning targets and lesson planning aligned to the workshop model. In most classrooms teaching strategies included teachers using and requiring students to use academic vocabulary, scaffolding techniques including questions stems and prompts, turn and talk, the use of equity (popsicle) sticks to increase students active engagement with 'lifelines so that students can ask another student for assistance, and student-choice that is encouraged when choosing a strategy to use. For example, in math classrooms, students are encouraged to evaluate which strategies are most effective for each of them to use, and are given the freedom to choose the strategy which will help them be most successful with the problems they encounter.
- Across classrooms, students had structured opportunities to engage in tasks on their own or with their peers to build critical thinking skills through an intense focus on project-based and problem-based instruction. In some classrooms, however, tasks are still heavily scaffolded and teacher-directed, hindering student independence, and ownership. For example, in a math class, although the lesson plan stated that students would be given tasks on varying levels of difficulty to work independently, the teacher dominated the lesson, focusing on one problem so that there were few opportunities for students to turn-and-talk and to work independently on problems that offer extension into more academically challenged material. Similarly, in a Humanities class, the warm up lasted longer than necessary, and the lesson did not strategically provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions into the curricula for all learners to be cognitively engaged.
- In a grade 7 social studies class, students were asked to examine different Document Based questions (DBQ's) to determine possible bias, unalienable rights guaranteed according to the Declaration of Independence, and gain an understanding of the Declaration of Independence and policies created/established during and after the American Revolution. Students were asked to read, analyze, and discuss primary and secondary sources and work in groups to complete an analysis chart by citing specific textual evidence to support analysis of these sources. Similarly, in a science class, students developed an understanding of how heating and cooling causes movement in the form of convection currents in the Earth's mantle by observing liquids of different temperatures interact. Students engaged in a lab activity and applied skills of reading, writing, math, science, and technology, by observing how liquids of different temperatures interact and answered questions by applying their observations to the convection currents happening within the earth's mantle.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Curricula and academic tasks are revised using student work and data to support diverse student needs.

Impact

The schools curricular decisions build coherence for all learners. Across subjects, teachers make intentional decisions to emphasize key standards and target students' areas of weaknesses, and promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Rubicon Atlas-a web-based curriculum management tool that allows teachers to build a standards-aligned curriculum, which ensures backwards design planning for each unit focused on addressing standards that students are required to know, and the evident gaps that need to be addressed. This information is used to refine curricula and create performance tasks that offer differentiated access so that all students are cognitively engaged in their learning.
- Curriculum planning and refinement take place two to three times a year based on data and authentic student work. Teachers look at student work regularly to determine students' understanding, and to evaluate and modify curricula and academic tasks. Moreover, Teacher teams regularly engage with data gathered from periodic assessments to reflect on student growth as well as gaps in student learning. For example, on a recent English language arts assessment, students demonstrated skill deficiencies when engaging with literary or poetic texts. Humanities teachers adjusted their instructional focus to include more fiction and poetry, and to explicitly address Common Core Learning Standards that focused on figurative language, vocabulary development, and literary techniques. Teacher teams have ensured continued improvement of the quality of their curriculum planning and mapping with the utilization of peer evaluation of unit plans. The staff designed a rubric to evaluate unit plans and provide feedback. This practice has allowed teachers to calibrate and agree on a standard of unit planning, which has helped the progress of the school's diverse learners.
- The school uses a uniform school-wide template to create lesson plans that include the New York State content standards and Common Core Learning Standards, the schools focus, essential questions, materials, literacy and differentiation strategies, vocabulary, content knowledge, language and performance skills, thematic connections and assessments and reflection activities.
- Curricula maps provide evidence that the school develops rigorous academic tasks through the adaptation of instructional materials from EngageNY, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Common Core Library, and the New York City Science and Social Studies Scope and Sequence.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments in all subject areas, tracks student progress, and consistently checks for understanding.

Impact

The school's systems to monitor progress through data analysis as well as during instruction are used regularly to guide adjustments in units and lessons to meet students' needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school utilizes common assessments in all content areas, such as Achievement Network (A-Net), Achieve 3000, Write to Learn, Khan Academy, and MyOwn, which provide robust information on student performance and progress.
- Across all classrooms, teachers used exit slips, peer feedback checklists, student self-assessment checklists, and rubrics specific to the tasks, to adjust lessons. Adjustments observed included, use of audio-visual aids, PowerPoints, calculators, white boards, leveled texts, and a variety of graphic organizers that included diagrams, instruments, music stands, sheet music, and performance rubrics.
- Classroom visits and meetings with teachers indicated that the school uses ongoing assessments to group students and adjust lesson plans as well as provide feedback on student work including next steps. Students say that teachers confer with them and give them strategies on how to improve their work. However, classroom visits also indicated that teachers across the vast majority of classrooms do not always utilize checks for understanding to make immediate adjustments in daily lessons. For example, in one math class most students understood the task but the teacher still gave a lengthy explanation to the entire class. Similarly, in a science class observed, the teacher did not accurately assess that most students understood the task. The teacher dedicated a great deal of lesson time to explanation and introduction before sending students to work independently, thereby minimizing independent work time and opportunities for students, particularly for higher achievement students, to engage in rich, high-level thinking and discussion with peers.

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

Teachers engage in inquiry work systematically analyzing the impact of teacher practice and strengthening leadership roles. Teacher teams play an integral role in key school decisions and are currently expanding their work, and deepening their study of the needs of individual students.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved pedagogy and student progress on assessments. Teams are deepening their focus on using data and aligning instructional strategies that are beginning to yield outcomes for students. Shared leadership structures build capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher leaders, who represent each grade or discipline, meet weekly to discuss student work and data, and bi-monthly with the instructional cabinet to discuss professional development and teacher practice.
- Teachers articulated that they felt empowered to have input on decisions toward the development of instructional resources across grades. A review of the Learning Environment survey (LES) indicated that 100% of teachers agree that working together on teams improve their educational practice.
- Teachers regularly engage with data gathered from period assessments to reflect on, student growth as well as gaps in student learning. Data sources include initial baseline assessments in the Fall and Winter, Achievement Network, NYCDOE Measures of Student Learning, and benchmarks. Data is then used to create an “Action Plan”, through which teachers plan for how to adjust instructional plans to allow for re-teaching or to address gaps in student learning. For example, on a recent English language arts assessment, students demonstrated skills’ deficiencies when engaging with literary or poetic texts. Teachers adjusted their instructional focus to include more fiction and poetry, and explicitly address the Common Core Learning Standard that focused on figurative language, vocabulary development, and literary techniques.