



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Booker T. Washington School

Middle School M054

**103 West 107th Street
Manhattan
NY 10025**

Principal: Elana Elster

**Date of review: May 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Andrea Harris**

The School Context

The Booker T. Washington School is a middle school with 800 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 21% Black, 22% Hispanic, 46% White, and 11% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 -2014 was 93.0%.

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	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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks, and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks, and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- Unit tasks consistently ask students to demonstrate the ability to synthesize, evaluate and apply information across the grades and subjects. In social studies units on the Civil War, students are asked to evaluate the credibility of primary and secondary source information, form opinions around topics, and defend positions supporting their claims and addressing counter claims and making connections to historical events. An English Language Arts (ELA) unit on “Literary Devices” explored analyzing themes and conflicts, supporting determinations with text based evidence.
- Curriculum maps incorporate reading, writing and real world application. For example, a grade 7 unit on “The Science Fair” was designed to discuss the Scientific Method. Plans revealed unpacking vocabulary, application via an investigation and students ability to write a testable hypothesis. The rigorous argumentative task called for students to write a scientific research paper with cited sources, design a controlled experiment, organize and collect data, develop a conclusion based on both the results of the experiment and prior research. Additionally, a grade 7 math task asked students to rewrite expressions in different forms to illustrate how quantities are related.
- Across grades and subjects, instructional units plan coherently included essential questions, big ideas/enduring understandings, knowledge and content, skills and strategies mini lessons, and small group instruction. Units are created around essential questions. For example, the essential question on a humanities unit on isolationism is, “How do values influence the interactions of people?” Specific texts with selections from Mark Twain, Emma Goldman, Josiah Strong, Theodore Roosevelt, Alfred Mahan and Rudyard Kipling were noted. As a result of the task, students will analyze propaganda and mass media and examine foreign and domestic policy phenomena. Similarly an essential question for the Geometry unit is “How do we make connections between perimeter, area, surface area, and volume to solve problems? For the pitch/melodic literacy unit in music, the essential question is, “How do we read music?”

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school provides instructional supports and engaging student activities that align to the instructional focus with lessons consistently providing multiple entry points and extensions that deepen student learning and reasoning.

Impact

Students produce meaningful work products and experience lessons that are challenging as well as questioning that broadens students' problem solving abilities. However, not all students demonstrate ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Classrooms visited had students organized in groups with consistent participation in discussions that were supported by the teacher. Students explored their thinking and at times challenged each other's ideas and justified thoughts using text-based evidence to support their reasoning. In a grade 7 math class, the teacher created a graphic organizer to support students working on two dimensional geometric shapes. She asked students to find the sum of the interior angles of a polygon as it relates to the number of triangles that are formed by drawing diagonals from one vertex. Students worked in pairs discussing the best way to solve the problem and then executed a solution. The teacher called three students to the board and students shared out regarding the strategies used to find solutions to the problem. In each case, students responded appropriately explaining how they found their solution.
- In most classrooms students engaged in self-selected activities and received feedback from the teacher as well as other students. Student discussions were robust with high level questions prompted by teachers. In some, but not all classes, when students completed tasks quickly they immediately turned their attention to self-selected extra credit activities that further challenged and deepened their thinking.
- During a sixth grade math lesson students were asked to complete a worksheet on converting fractions and decimals. The class was divided into five work groups all using the same worksheet. The teacher circulated the room asking students to explain their work using evidence to support their answers. Students had a DOK matrix on their desk and were expected to reference it in their answers. Students in four out of the five groups successfully completed the worksheet. The teacher assisted the students in the fifth group who were unable to complete the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness and offer ongoing feedback to staff, students and parents. The Danielson Framework for Teaching is used as a guide to ensure high quality instruction is delivered daily.

Impact

Systems and structures that hold staff, parents and students accountable for achieving those high expectations have been collaboratively developed fostering an environment that promotes high levels of student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership uses a weekly newsletter to communicate high expectations to parents and all staff members. Teacher teams discuss these expectations and how to best implement them on the classroom level. Additionally, leaders set clear expectations during one-on-one conversations with teachers broadening opportunities for teacher collaboration. For example, parent and student orientations are held at the start of every school year. Students and parents learn about the high expectations and receive a written overview of the year's curriculum and work products students are expected to complete. Teachers developed a self-assessment tool based on the Danielson rubric to be used prior to monthly meetings. This tool helps to drive the conversation as well as teacher reflection regarding norming effective and highly effective instructional practices.
- There are teacher grade teams and teacher department teams focusing on the improvement of teachers' daily delivery of instruction. Monday professional learning opportunities for staff promote high expectations. For example, staff studied the art of questioning along with Depth of Knowledge (DOK) matrix that resulted in an increase in higher level questioning evidenced in both teacher and student talk. In classrooms teachers can be heard using such prompts as "Can you explain your thinking?" or "How did you come to that conclusion? Support your response with text based evidence."
- Families receive a monthly newsletter highlighting expectations. Every month there are parent workshops, emails and phone blasts sharing information such as Common Core Learning Standards and how they affect daily teaching and learning practices. Parents stated they are consistently informed about what is being taught as well as learning expectations for all students.
- To provide on-going feedback all teachers have conferring binders and students are provided actionable feedback during and following all learning experiences. School leadership makes weekly visits to classrooms ensuring instructional coherence across all classes including those containing English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. To build learning capacity in the home there are parent workshops. This is in addition to Tuesday parent teacher meeting times when parents have opportunities to engage in conversations regarding various learning topics.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers create and use common assessments, rubrics and grading policies ensuring a common understanding of performance and progress among varied student groups in all content areas.

Impact

Teachers meet and use these formative assessments to inform daily instructional practices and adjustments. Students receive instructions based on their individual needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher planning is based on various common benchmark assessments given during and at the completion of units across content areas. This affords teachers the opportunity to adjust lessons targeting the needs of all students inclusive of ELLs as well as students with disabilities. Teachers share these results as well as strategies for improving their instructional practice. It is a school wide expectation that the practice for constant checks for student understanding be a routine part of every lesson. For example, across content area classes there is the use of peer-to-peer assessment while in special education and classes for ELLs use the thumbs up or thumbs down strategy to show understanding.
- Teacher developed rubrics and assessment tools foster student self-assessment of their work. Students are consistently asked to explain their thinking based on a rubric. For example, a check-off style rubric was used by students across subject areas, including English Language Arts, math, and science supporting higher order thinking and student to student feedback. Across classrooms this check off style rubric, as well as a DOK tool, is affixed to the desk top of every student for their personal reference. Students' constantly refer to these tools when engaged in learning, speaking and listening activities. This practice allows teachers to make immediate adjustments in their teaching throughout lessons.
- Teacher leaders are responsible for sharing the results of all common assessments with school leadership to determine progress made on both individual, classroom and grade levels towards meeting school wide goals. These performance levels are designed to align with New York State performance levels. For example, on English Language Arts and math assessments containing 25 questions, a student would have to score at least 19 correct to be considered a level 2. Parents are consistently kept abreast of student performance through outreach to parents on Tuesdays.

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

Teacher teams meet regularly to analyze and discuss student performance and work products determining how best to use this information to drive daily instructional practices.

Impact

The instructional capacity of teachers is strengthened and students make progress toward meeting their goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school teachers engage in structured, inquiry based activities that promote professional collaborations towards achieving school goals and deliver rigorous lessons addressing the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Teachers engage in inter-visitations and view each other as resources for validating their work and ensuring instructional coherence content wide and across grade levels. This work has resulted in strengthening the instructional capacity among teachers within the school community. Teachers credit strong teamwork for the increase in student achievement as evidenced by the growth of more than 4 percentage points on both English Language Arts and math New York State standardized exams.
- Teacher teams use a broad range of data including classroom inter-visitation to support teacher development. They have also incorporated the data from the student surveys fostering staff members to reflect deeply about teaching and learning. Teachers are empowered by the school wide philosophy of “Each one, teach one”, which results in colleagues providing professional learning opportunities for each other. Based on their school wide assessment data, teacher teams identified a need to focus on writing. The data also supported the need to build trust among the staff prior to targeting classroom practices in this area. This resulted in several opportunities for teachers to share best practices in both formal and informal settings. Teacher team groups developed writing benchmarks and rubrics for both horizontal and vertical use among the staff. The improvement in writing for students including students with disabilities and ELLs is proudly displayed throughout the building.
- Teacher teams work collaboratively reviewing norms as they analyze student work. All team meetings are driven by outcome-based agendas. Conversations focus on how teachers can teach and re-teach content ensuring that all students learn and take ownership by applying and analyzing their work demonstrating critical thinking. Distributive leadership is at the forefront of teacher-led collaborative meetings. The main focus of these meetings allows teachers latitude to guide discussions on student learning as well as how best to address any gaps that may surface. Teachers feel they have a real voice and decision making power involving daily delivery of instructional content.