



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Hamilton Grange Middle School

Middle School M209

**500 West 138th St
Manhattan
NY 10031**

Principal: Benjamin Lev

**Date of review: May 18, 2015
Reviewer: Manuel Ramirez**

The School Context

Hamilton Grange is a middle school with 75 students in grade 6. The school population comprises 10% Black, 88% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 47% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 63% of the students enrolled and girls account for 37%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.0%.

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	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	Developing
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

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations in all aspects of school culture, focusing on the Danielson Framework for Teaching, college and career readiness, and collaborations that support all staff and families in understanding and meeting those expectations.

Impact

Systems and structures that support high expectations and collaboration among staff and with families effectively communicate accountability for achieving the expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff through daily supervisory visits and actionable feedback, using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In addition, the principal sends weekly news to staff via e-mail, communicating expectations and upcoming events. The principal is involved in all professional development activities on a weekly and monthly basis to support teachers in building a shared understanding of the school's expectations for teaching and learning, with targeted attention to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Weekly professional development activities focus on the school wide instructional focus, which is argumentative writing. *Lost At School*, *The Talent Code*, and *Mindset* are examples of books that school leaders and staff have read in an effort to build the shared belief that all students can learn through focused practice of incremental skills.
- The staff and the principal are in frequent communication with parents about the curricula and expectations for all students at each grade level. The school holds information sessions four times per year and teachers review grade expectations with parents during those meetings. Families are also provided with opportunities to accompany their children on field trips to Columbia University, Barnard and City College of New York. The school has a partnership with these universities that includes tutoring conducted by college students and professors in the arts, debate, humanities and math.
- Parents reported that the principal maintains an open door policy and all staff members consistently communicate with them regarding their children's progress. Parents receive phone calls and the school uses the Pupil Path online grading system to keep families informed about their children's progress towards Common Core aligned expectations for learning and college and career readiness goals. Parent workshops are presented by the principal and teachers throughout the year on topics such as the Common Core Learning Standards, college and career readiness, curricula supports, and parenting health. Additionally, the school sends out monthly calendars of upcoming events.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, pedagogical practices inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

In most classrooms, students are not consistently engaged in appropriately challenging tasks or discussions that require high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Although students were working collaboratively across all classrooms visited, there was inconsistent evidence of student-to-student discussion, use of academic language and evidence-based accountable talk. In a grade 6 science class, students were asked to design an experiment to test the effect of water pollution on plant growth. The teacher explained the task and students were observed working in groups. However, the lesson was teacher-centered, as only students who raised their hands were called on. Students were not observed engaging in peer-peer discussions or explaining their thinking after they answered the teacher's questions.
- School leadership stated that the instructional focus for the year was on argumentative writing. However in most classrooms observed, tasks given to students did not require them to express a point of view supported with evidence, or think critically in reasoning, making answer choices, and weighing evidence. In addition, the use of varied entry points to engage students in learning was uneven. For example, in a grade 6 character education class, students were assigned a reading and were given six minutes to determine why bottled water is more popular than tap water. The teacher did not provide different entry points to support students' diverse needs and intellectually engage all learners in the activity. Most students struggled to complete the task in the allotted time.
- In some classrooms visited, students were not cognitively challenged by the assigned tasks. For example, in a grade 6 literacy class, emergent bilingual students were observed reading and discussing how kids help other kids around the world. The aim of the lesson was, "How can kids help kids?" As several students dominated the discussion, there were limited opportunities for all students to contribute to the discussion and deepen their understanding of the topic. Most students were not observed justifying their answers or challenging their peers' thinking.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Administrators and staff ensure that the school curricula are aligned to the Common Core State Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Teachers use data and student work to plan and refine academic tasks and curricula.

Impact

The well aligned coherent curricula results in academic tasks that are designed to be engaging, accessible and supportive of college and career readiness for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has aligned the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards in English Language Arts and math for grade 6 and ensures that the curricula include activities to promote college and career readiness. In addition, the school has partnered with Urban Advantage and the New York City Department of Education Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics Initiative to ensure that teachers create lessons and units aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts across content areas. The school's decision to adapt units of study from Engage New York also promotes successful collaborative planning and coherence of curricula across subject areas.
- Teachers utilized resources such as *It Takes a Village Master Teacher* and *Engage NY* to design and create an end of year interdisciplinary unit of study addressing three major skill gaps that were identified by teachers. A review of unit plans and lesson plans provided evidence of adjustments made to units and teacher plans, such as teaching more academic vocabulary daily, increased use of a range of literature and informational texts at varying degrees of text complexity in daily instruction, and the addition of more tasks employing close reading strategies for reading comprehension.
- Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using students' work. For example, after a review of a math end of unit assessment, teacher teams decided to revise some of the units of study from *Engage NY*. Adjustments to unit 2 for grade 6 included more skills added to the unit, the addition of lessons on area, volume and perimeter, and a three day unit on graphing, in preparation for a unit on ratios. The pace of the lessons was also modified to accommodate the different learning needs of the students, with targeted attention to the diverse needs of the large percentage of English language learners and students with disabilities in this small school.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing their use of common assessments to measure student progress towards goals across content areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Inconsistent use of common assessments and uneven checks for student understanding hinder effective curricula and instructional adjustments to meet the learning needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's assessment program includes Teachers College Reading and Writing Running Records, New York state assessment item analysis, baseline writing tasks, Wilson Reading Program Progress Report, and argumentative writing assessments. Teachers also indicated that they use rubrics, checklists and student self-assessment to evaluate the level of student mastery of learning goals.
- During teacher team meetings, teachers reported that the school affords them opportunities to refine the curricula and develop assessments during the summer. However, teacher practice in developing assessments, using rubrics and providing feedback to students is in an emergent stage across classrooms. Additionally, a meeting with teacher teams revealed that the analysis of the data to drive instructional decision making is not yet a consistent practice across grades and subject areas. Teachers stated that they need professional development in this area to ensure that they can effectively use data obtained from assessments to inform teaching and learning. During lessons viewed, there was little evidence that teachers utilize data from ongoing real-time assessments to modify instructional strategies or lesson activities.
- The school uses rubrics aligned to the Common Core State Standards, such as an essay rubric and a newspaper article rubric, to evaluate performance tasks and student work on writing assignments. A review of portfolios during classroom visits and conversations with students showed some evidence of the use of rubrics and feedback to students in the form of "glows" and "grows" on some work samples. However, across grades and subjects, feedback provided to students was inconsistent and did not support students' understanding regarding specific and actionable next steps to improve the work. For example, a mid-unit reading assessment for a grade 6 student did not contain teacher feedback. Additionally, a mid-winter assignment in math provided limited feedback via check marks to indicate correct responses and a circle to indicate incorrect responses.

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

Teachers participate in structured inquiry-based collaborations focused on the school’s instructional goals. Team collaborations provide a vehicle for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in school-wide efforts to effectively promote school goals, including the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, and contribute to improved teacher pedagogy and student learning. A distributive leadership structure builds teacher leadership capacity.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are provided with opportunities to meet vertically and horizontally two times per week and co-teachers are provided with common planning time. During the teacher team meeting observed, teachers followed an agenda and indicated that minutes of meetings are recorded in Google drive. New teachers are provided with the opportunity to meet weekly with mentor teachers, the principal and the network achievement coach. The school uses inter-visitation as a form of professional development to support new teachers with planning and instruction.
- During teacher team meetings, teachers articulated that they are afforded opportunities to have a voice in making school level decisions. For example, teachers collaborate on the agenda for all Wednesday professional learning committee team meetings. Teachers also routinely plan and facilitate professional development sessions on a rotating basis. Five out of the six teachers in this school have facilitated professional development activities during Monday professional development days and all share best practices with other staff at large.
- Teachers meet in teams to examine student data and adjust instruction to meet students’ needs. For example, a group of teachers developed an interdisciplinary unit based on student work and data obtained from an argumentative writing task. The interdisciplinary unit included skills that the students were struggling with, Common Core State Standards aligned to the targeted writing skills, performance assessments, and essential questions.