

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

West Side Collaborative Middle School

Middle School M250

**735 West End Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10025**

Principal: Novella Bailey

**Date of review: April 30, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit**

The School Context

West Side Collaborative Middle School a middle school with 189 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 35% Black, 51% Hispanic, 10% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.2%.

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	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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

The vast majority of teachers are involved in inquiry-based professional collaborations and distributive leadership structures. Teachers systematically analyze key elements of teacher practice and student work.

Impact

The teacher collaborations have strengthened teacher instructional capacity, promoted Common Core aligned work, resulted in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for students. Teachers play a central role in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have many opportunities to collaborate and strengthen instructional practices. Teachers meet in content area and grade level teams. They participate in intervisitations led by lead teachers. They are instructional coaches and demonstration teachers who open their doors to one another. One teacher shared “one teacher asked me to come visit to see a practice fish bowl because they knew my goals [and knew this would help me meet them]”. In Advance, teacher practice has seen a 31% increase in effectiveness in Domain 3.
- Teachers lead the work at the school, as well as make decisions that affect student learning school wide. They make recommendations for the advisory program, for the school’s application for Progressive Redesign Opportunity for Schools of Excellence (PROSE), as well as scheduling. They support the planning and implementation of the professional development plans. They developed the Personal Learning Module (PLM) curriculum and the competency-based Common Core aligned humanities rubric, which promotes the Common Core and instructional shifts as it focuses on students’ ability to research and take notes, write an argument and know the conventions of writing.
- Teachers look at student work and data to make decisions at the school. They used student data to develop school wide protocols and rubrics, such as the PLM curriculum, competency based CCLS aligned rubric, as well as decided on adopting and adapting aspects of CMP3 because of its project-based learning modules, and Expeditionary Learning since it would help students to develop skills to access non-fiction texts, at the school. During the teacher team meeting observed, the teachers were looking at an 8th grade student with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)’s writing. They identified what they saw, what the student knew how to do and what he needs to learn. Some of the next steps identified for him were to have him work with more than one resource in order to quote accurately from more than one article, and to group him with the fact-gathering group rather than the peer editing group, which was his original group.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula to promote high levels of student products.

Impact

Students have access to the curricula, are engaged in appropriately challenging activities and are able to produce work and participate in discussions that reflect high levels of student thinking. However, high quality supports and extensions in the curricula are lacking impeding all students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills and thus take ownership of their work.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers' practices reflect an articulated belief about how students learn best. Across classrooms, students self-assess, are given choice in their work, are engaged in rigorous and collaborative activities, and reflect on their work. The school leader and staff believe that students need to become more independent and the way to this is by modifying curricula appropriately based on their needs. In an 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were working on laptops to finish their presentations on either solitary confinement or immigration. They were using a rubric to help them define the project's standards in their own words and explain how they would evaluate themselves in this standard.
- Across classrooms, work products and discussions demonstrated high levels of student thinking. For example, in a 6th grade ELA class, students were doing research on the 1920's and 30's to prepare for the reading of "Bud, Not Buddy". In another 6th grade class, students were working in centers to determine the effects, causes and characteristics of climate change. They either read, watched or graphed in their groups information about this subject in order to understand the different aspects of this controversial topic. When asked how the video related to the topic of climate change, one of the groups watching the documentaries explained that because temperatures were rising, ice shelves were breaking off in the cold areas and affecting water levels in the warmer climates.
- Although students were engaged in grade level work and participation was high across classrooms, teaching practices did not allow students across the vast majority of classrooms to engage in appropriately challenging activities and work that enabled them to own their learning. In two classes observed, the scaffolds offered to students did not provide, in one class the appropriate extensions, and in another, the appropriate supports. In a science class, the teacher sat with one group during their experiment and told them what to do, how to do it, where to write their answers. The graphic organization provided did not fully support them with the work. In another class, students struggled to set up fractions. Although they worked in groups, all of the group members struggled with solving the problem.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions to ensure curricula and tasks are aligned to the standards and the instructional shifts and are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Decisions made by the staff help build coherence and promote college and career readiness skills, as well as allow students to have access to the curricula and academic tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula and academic tasks are aligned to the Common Core, the instructional shifts and the content standards. The school utilizes resources such as Expeditionary Learning (EL), CMP3, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and EngageNY as the foundation for its curricula. In the 7th grade, teachers developed a protocol for students to use to debate effectively the “Write to Talk” protocol. Additionally, to ensure the required reading is done on a grade and received adequate time for analysis, the EL unit, which focused on a close study of the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, was moved from the English language arts curriculum to the social studies curriculum.
- Teachers developed rubrics, checklists and protocols that are used throughout the grades and subject areas to build coherence. For example Think Time questions (TTQs) are activities or prompts that help students to preview or review work at the beginning of a lesson. It is used throughout the classrooms and provides opportunities for students to be cognitively engaged.
- Data analyses have provided the school with information that has allowed them to make curricular and programmatic decisions that promote access to the curricula for students. Personal learning modules (PLMs) are developed by teachers for students. They are cyclical courses that provide targeted supports for students on navigating non-fiction, engaging in literacy analysis, and developing strong writing skills. Students’ self-assessment of their own learning styles and academic needs informs students’ placements in their PLM modules. Moreover, the 8th humanities teacher team decided to switch modules within the ELA program to challenge students in developing argumentative writing skills early in the year. The unit on Omnivore Dilemma was taught first with success this year as teachers noticed students’ ability to write improved.

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and created assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals and teachers' assessment practices reflect the use of student self and peer assessment.

Impact

Teachers are able to make curricular adjustments to meet the needs of all learners because of the common assessments and common practices they use that provide feedback to them and students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use and create rubrics and assessments aligned to the grading policy and the curricula to provide feedback to students and teachers. Teachers developed a standards-based progress report to give feedback to students around their progress towards goals. Students are allowed to revise their work within eight days and thus revise their grades. These progress reports provide next steps to students in the form of resources, such as links that are embedded in them. Links to Kahn Academy have been shared with students in the progress report as a way to clarify misconceptions or preview other work outside of the classroom.
- Across classrooms, teachers confer with students and provide immediate feedback. In a 6th grade ELA class, the teacher walked around writing one to two next steps or questions for students on post-its after they would confer, to ensure the next steps are clear for the students. Although actionable feedback is more evident in ELA work, it is given to students throughout the subject areas.
- Teachers use math quizzes, exit tickets, on-demand writing assignments, conferencing notes, among others to adjust curricula and instruction. Teachers use common assessments to determine "Focus" groups for math and literacy, as well as personal learning module (PLMs) courses for students. Students are provided with a survey to review their interests and also given a rubric to evaluate their work based in PLMs. Based on common data analyzed, ELA, as well as math, focus classes are also offered to students to meet their needs in addition to the core content class.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and students and provide the supports needed to meet those expectations. School leaders and staff also communicate high expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness to students and their families.

Impact

Consequently, teachers and staff establish a culture of learning and of mutual accountability that communicates a unified set of expectations for all. Students and families are aware of their progress and next steps towards those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader consistently communicates high expectations to the staff and arranges for supports for teachers to meet these expectations resulting in a culture of mutual accountability. The teachers' professional learning plan is differentiated to meet the needs of the teachers. Teachers receive support from the school leader, the coach, peers and from outside organizations including the network. Teachers are also expected to share with colleagues, as well as implement the new learning in their classrooms. Teacher leaders work on unit reflections, assessments and student portfolio practices with Teaching Matters consultants which they then share with the school community.
- The school communicates through a variety of mediums with families to inform them of students' progress and the ways in which families can support their children. The school makes phone calls, sends emails, flyers, and text messages to share information. It organizes monthly parent chats with the principal, workshops and parent office hours. It also shares the living progress report online with families in order to help them understand student progress and next steps. These progress reports are regularly updated with the standards being learned in class and contain resources for parents and students to use to support learning and academic development.
- The staff has established a culture of learning with high expectations for all. Students spoke about the goals they set, monitor and present during the student-led conferences. Students are also expected to share their next steps with families during these presentations. Students develop goals during their weekly academic coaching "basecamp" classes. They are surveyed about their interests for example, for "passion advisory" affinity electives, as well as personal learning modules to support students' comprehension of literacy skills. They participate in Tweens and Teens in Action, and have google accounts to develop their 21st century communication skills. Feedback is often given online and work also submitted online. Additionally, students are able to monitor their learning and are being prepared for the next level.