

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence

Middle School M256

**154 West 93rd Street
Manhattan
NY, 10025**

Principal: Brian Zager

Dates of review: March 4, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Ilene Altschul

The School Context

M.S. 256, The School of Academic & Athletic Excellence is a Middle school with 159 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 48% Black, 48% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 – 2014 was 87%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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	Additional Findings	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.	Focus	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.	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.	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Findings

The majority of teachers work collaboratively in team meetings by grade and content area to ensure the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers take on leadership roles and are empowered to give input in key school-wide decisions.

Impact

As a result of collaborative planning and teacher voice in curriculum and professional development, there is an increase in teachers' instructional capacity.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participate in grade level and content team meetings a minimum of once a week. Using the protocol from Applied Training Learning and Study Communities (ATLAS) teachers analyze student work, identify trends and next steps. For example, during the observed math team meeting, teachers reviewed tiered student exit tickets and identified the need to further develop students' computational skills. Teachers also discussed the practices they can apply in their instruction such as identifying and reteaching pre-requisite skills and using multiple exit tickets to align with students' level in mathematics.
- Principal and teachers state that as a result of the work of the teacher teams it has strengthened their practice through the sharing of resources, planning rigorous lessons with differentiated tasks and utilizing rubrics.
- Special Education teachers work collaboratively on the content area teacher team and through the sharing of mathematics practice and collaborative planning are able to provide additional targeted assistance to the students in class as well during the pull-out support services. For example, according to the Math STAR assessment 69% of all Special Education students made progress and 31% made over one year's growth.
- Teachers take on leadership roles such as department heads, members of the professional development committee, peer instructional coaches, data manager, oversee Special Education department, and afterschool liaison. As a result, most teachers take on additional responsibilities aligned with their strengths. Teachers state the principal looks for their input and the school is much more collaborative. One central focus of the teamwork is around developing the curriculum ensuring the teachers are vested and involved in what is being taught across grade levels. Another example is the professional development committee identified the need for increasing questioning and discussion techniques and the committee selected the Center for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE) to work with the staff and provide training.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers are beginning to use common assessments, formative and summative assessment data, and rubrics to measure student progress and provide feedback to students.

Impact

Consequently, students are receiving limited actionable feedback as to their next learning steps. Teachers are inconsistently utilizing the results of assessments to adjust curricula and instruction impeding all students' academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- School utilizes a variety of assessments including STAR English language arts and math assessment, benchmark assessments in all subject areas, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), teacher created assessments, and student work to track student progress. Teachers upload grades on to Jupiter grades, an online grade book, to inform parents and students of their progress.
- Principal collects and reviews teacher's assessments to ensure that the test is aligned to the instructional goals and content standards. Principal provides feedback to the teachers to ensure that the questions are rigorous and challenging. There is limited evidence on the impact of the feedback on classroom instruction.
- Students are aware of their grades through Jupiter grades as well as reviewing their tests and assignments. One student indicated that he has made a lot of progress in reading through the Light Sail on-line program from 635 to 985. However a review of student work across a variety of grades and subjects shows evidence of limited feedback and inconsistent use of rubrics.
- The results of the assessments in mathematics and English language arts revealed students struggling with computation skills particularly multiplication and division and in grades seven and eight many students are lagging in their comprehension skills. This data is used to identify students in need of academic intervention services, however the data is not regularly reviewed to identify specific trends. In addition, there isn't a clear process to identify new students or discontinue students as they show progress.
- During the math meeting, the teachers analyzed student work. It revealed that students struggled with understanding how to change a decimal to a fraction, the mathematical vocabulary and using a calculator. As a result, the teacher was re-teaching converting a decimal to a fraction during a class observation. The teacher utilized the data to identify a gap but the lesson did not address the needs of all students hindering further progress.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that the curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and integrate content standards and the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks emphasize higher order thinking for all students.

Impact

As a result of strategic planning across grades there is coherence and emphasis on the content and skills needed to ensure college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- As a new leader, the principal ensures that all teachers have a fully developed curriculum. The principal provided professional development on the expectations and components of a curriculum map using a uniform format. The sessions included teaching how to write essential questions, using the Depth of Knowledge wheel to develop questions and tasks, understand the Common Core Learning Standards, and creating and embedding assessments. As a result, every department has developed a coherent curriculum.
- This year, the special education integrated co-teachers are assigned to a content area and teach vertically across all grades rather than assigned to a grade and a class for all subjects. This enables the teachers to develop their content knowledge and support the students with disabilities. The Special Education teachers and English as a second language teacher work collaboratively with the general education teachers to ensure that the curricula and academic tasks are planned with supports such as use of visual aids, videos, photographs, graphic organizers, and emphasis on vocabulary. For example, in an Earth Science class, students were given vocabulary supports to complete the lab report.
- The curricula emphasizes the instructional shifts such as integrating literacy across content areas, connecting activities and tasks to real-life experiences, and citing evidence from texts. In a sixth grade English language arts, argumentative unit, students read articles and conducted surveys to prepare for a debate on whether there should be extended day for middle school. In an eighth grade class, the students are learning about World War II. Students are reading and analyzing primary and secondary documents including a letter from a private during the war, political cartoons and propaganda to determine bias.
- Review of curriculum maps and unit plans indicate unit name or theme, essential questions, enduring understanding and performance indicators, assessment strategies, student tasks, standards and modifications for students with disabilities and English language learners. In the English language arts and science unit plans the level of cognitive challenge for each task is identified according to the Depth of Knowledge wheel to ensure rigorous activities for all students.

Findings

While teaching practices are becoming aligned by the Danielson framework for teaching, there was inconsistent evidence of supports and scaffolds. The level of student thinking and participation varies across the school.

Impact

The level of rigor in lessons and academic tasks varies among classrooms inhibiting all students from being cognitively engaged and increasing the academic achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Principal identified the instructional focus is to ensure higher level questioning, rigorous instruction and providing multiple entry points for all learners. There are several teachers that are demonstration teachers and peer instructional coaches through the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) to support teacher pedagogy aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers visit their classrooms and discuss the lessons with a focus on meeting the needs of the students at their instructional level. They have also received professional development from Center for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE) on questioning.
- In integrated co-teaching classes, students were grouped and receiving small group instruction from a teacher. In a math class, the teacher was guiding the students through the task and students were given a calculator to focus on the objective of the lesson of graphing an equation rather than focusing on the computation. In an English language arts class, the Special education teacher worked with a small group of four students on finding the evidence and chunked the text as an additional support. However, this small group only received additional support during the end of the period and did not sufficiently support all the struggling students.
- In an English language arts (ELA) class, students were identifying the claim for a text. Students were to read a response utilizing a rubric, give it a score and defend their rating. However, some students were unclear about the expectations of the task and had difficulty explaining their reasoning. In another ELA class, students were comparing how modern authors create meaning looking at craft and tone but there was limited time to delve deeper into the comparison. In a science lesson the teacher began the lesson reviewing what was previously taught with a series of low-level questions. During these lessons, there were limited opportunities for student to student discussion and the students' cognitive challenge varied.
- In a sixth grade science class, students were to utilize a jigsaw protocol to read an informational science text. Prior to reading, there was a discussion about sympathy and empathy and the connection to the brain. The students were to think, pair, write and share. Many students in this class are French native language speakers and there were translations provided as well as opportunities for students to talk in French with their classmates to successfully master the content. This lesson introduced vocabulary, utilized a video for background information, and peer support to ensure all students were cognitively engaged and participating.

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

Findings

School leaders and staff establish a culture for learning that conveys high expectations and professionalism. The expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness are communicated to students and their families.

Impact

As a result, there is open communication with the staff, families and students who are all supported to achieve the expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Principal communicates his expectations for teaching through his faculty handbook, professional development, grade team and content team meetings, department leader meetings and through the feedback from formal and informal observations. Teachers concur that the principal provides immediate feedback with three actionable strategies towards improvement.
- Students state that the teachers and the principal push them to succeed. They connect with them and address their social and emotional concerns so that they can focus, learn and make progress. One student proudly exclaimed that this year he is doing ten times better than last year and that the principal has motivated him and helped him to improve taking school seriously. Students indicate that this year the culture is conducive to learning. They also stated that they are challenged and receive extra help either before or after school. Lastly, they are aware of their progress through the results of the STAR reading and math assessments and they regularly review their grades through Jupiter grades.
- Parents state that they receive regular feedback and communication from the teachers through email, phone calls, Jupiter grades, report cards and progress reports. They are aware of the expectations and state that teachers provide high-level curricula and provide additional assistance before or after school. The parents state that the school is welcoming to parents and that the principal and teachers emphasize the need to strive for success.
- This year teachers requested professional development to address the social-emotional needs of the students. As a result, Ramapo for Children provided training to the teachers with tools for creating an environment that supports success. They learned a tool for structuring conflict resolution conversations between students and strategies to address behavioral change. Teachers found the workshop aligned with their needs and was useful towards improving their practice.
- The principal holds regular town hall meetings. During the town hall meetings, the principal meets with every grade and reviews the expectations and discusses school and student concerns. The school held a meeting for seventh graders to review the high school directory so that they are familiar with the expectations and set goals to work towards for a successful high school admission process. Students state that the principal takes the time to talk to the students about how to do better. At the town hall meetings, students review their progress reports. The school also received a grant for twenty eighth graders to go to Binghamton University and be paired with a mentor to experience college course work, classes and college life.