



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Community Action School

Middle School M258

**154 West 93 Street
New York
NY 10025**

Principal: John Curry

Date of review: May 15, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Lucia Perez-Medina

The School Context

Community Action School is a middle school with 257 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 47% Black, 42% Hispanic, 7% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 31% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. 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	Additional Findings	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	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching and successfully partner with families to communicate expectations connected to student achievement and college and career readiness.

Impact

The embedded structures and systems of communication and support result in a culture of mutual accountability among all stakeholders and increased student progress towards expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has provided the faculty and staff with a vision of clear expectations. A support structure exists to ensure these expectations are met. School-wide meetings, smaller collaborative meetings, online communication tools and individualized, differentiated feedback are utilized to inform the school community. The Danielson Framework for Teaching has proven to be a valuable tool in helping administrator's articulate expectations for classroom pedagogy, professionalism and planning. Teachers voiced that this framework has helped them set a high standard for professional practice.
- Parents shared that the teachers are more than willing to work with them to help their children. For example, one parent stated, "My child was having difficulty in one class and the teacher went out of her way to consult with other teachers to obtain strategies to assist my child and shared those strategies with me to implement at home." The parent is noticing a significant difference with her child's engagement in school.
- Student led family conferences happen three times per year and students spend time in advisory classes reviewing feedback from teachers and formulating goals that will be shared with parents at the conference. Student achievement is celebrated quarterly at the Principal Honors Breakfast and Excellence Assembly.
- The High School Articulation committee meets throughout the year planning supports to aide students in transitioning to high school. Supports include advisory lessons specifically geared toward high school articulation, 7th and 8th grade high school workshops and school visits.
- The school provides many opportunities to inform students' parents and family members. On Curriculum Night teachers meet with parents and students to outline the year's curriculum and discuss parent involvement in students' academics. In addition, the school hosts incoming 6th grade orientation to prepare students for their middle school experience and have regular collaborations with 8th grade families to best match student preferences to high school choices. There are workshops to educate parents on Common Core; understand the instructional demands in their child's classroom and ways to support students' social-emotional development as well. Teachers regularly update and contact parents via *Teacher ease* regarding student academic and behavioral progress.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Strategic entry points in lessons and high quality supports for English language learners and students with disabilities vary across subject areas. Student discussions that prompt rich thinking and lead to ownership of the learning process are not as yet fully embedded across all classrooms.

Impact

Some lessons do not fully demonstrate ample refinement of instructional strategies to ensure strategic multiple entry points into the curricula to further promote rigorous discussion, critical thinking and ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In four of the classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions. In two classes, students evaluated evidence in an article for their argumentative essay and discussed their positions with their peers. During one lesson, students worked in groups to evaluate and prepare their opinion on excerpts from the book *Night*. Most students participated and responded in groups or to their partner. In another lesson, students had to evaluate evidence in an article for their argumentative essay and some students had the opportunity to discuss their positions with their peers.
- Across most classrooms, students had access to supports to accelerate student learning. For example, during an English language arts lesson English language learners had access to post-it's that included sentence starters to support their ideas. In a science lesson there were varied graphic organizers to accommodate various learning needs; however there were a few missed opportunities to strategically provide supports for a variety of learners, particularly students with disabilities. During a math lesson in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, all students had the opportunity to rotate stations and all students were expected to complete a worksheet on the converse of the Pythagorean Theorem with teacher led instruction. Some groups of students, including students with disabilities, struggled with the task, but were limited to support from the teacher without a toolkit of strategies to support their individual learning.
- During a 6th grade lesson, students worked in groups discussing the topic, "Should the school board spend money out of its budget in order to install surveillance cameras in all schools?" Within each group students were assigned varied roles, such as evaluator and debater. Students were expected to incorporate strong pieces of evidence and prove their stance. A group of students had the opportunity to engage in a rich discussion and build upon each other's ideas using evidence from the text. While the topics discussed in most classrooms were at high interest levels and students worked cooperatively, teachers' efforts to raise the level of student involvement and in-depth thinking in some of the observed classes were sometimes limited and student voices were not always heard in the discussions.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across grades and subjects, school leaders and teachers reflectively and strategically align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Emphasis on higher-order thinking skills is embedded in academic tasks and curricula for all learners.

Impact

Curricular decisions made by administrators and faculty result in instructional coherence across grades and content areas. All students, including English language learners and students with disabilities have access to rigorous curricula and demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams collaboratively refine curriculum maps and units of study, ensuring coherence of curricula and deep alignment to the Common Core State Standards across grades and content areas. The school designs their curricula by planning backwards using a detailed instructional model so that students can be engaged in authentic, intellectually rigorous work that requires deep, critical thinking. A review of unit plans show consistency through the use of a school wide instructional expectations planning template.
- A review of unit maps, lesson plans and student work reveal academic tasks that are threaded through themes linked to complex texts that immerse students in intellectually demanding learning activities. For example, across subjects, students are required to complete tasks such as evidence-based position papers. Additionally, across content areas, there are projects requiring students to delve deeply into academic vocabulary in producing informational essays or describing problem-solving steps. For example, in one grade 8 unit "The causes and effects of the Dust Bowl", students are required to identify cause and effect text structures, support inferences with evidence, make literary and historical connections and write an informational essay incorporating text-based evidence to support an analysis of texts on this topic.
- Lessons and academic tasks strategically integrate the instructional shifts across subject areas. For example, one seventh grade English language arts task required students to create a refute that addressed a counterclaim topic, relating to school security cameras and present it in their debate groups. Specific guidelines were provided for the students to follow.
- Academic tasks provide access to support English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWD) to engage cognitively with the curriculum. For example, a science lesson plan provided a range of tiered tasks for each learning center, based on their level of understanding with the concept of relative motion and its effects on the solar system.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use common assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across grades.

Impact

Teachers across classrooms and teams make effective adjustments to curriculum and provide actionable feedback resulting in students making progress and accelerating their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, formative assessment practices are embedded in daily lessons via questioning, sharing of ideas from group or partner work and startup trackers providing for immediate feedback on student mastery of content and skills related to learning goals.
- Teachers plan lessons utilizing student work and their knowledge of the individual student's needs. Across most classrooms teachers confer with individual students and give targeted feedback to some students. For example, teachers identified reading articles at different lexile levels and grouped students for instruction based on the analysis of the data from recent assessments.
- The school uses *Teacher ease*, an online grading system, where teachers regularly upload students' formative and summative data and other relevant information including student profiles. This data is tracked regularly by administrators and teachers to monitor student progress toward grade level goals. In addition, students have access to review their performance across the year for every marking period.
- Students presented their portfolio pieces and most students shared how they used the rubrics attached to their writing pieces. Feedback addressed what they did well and how they could improve their work. One student said, "I need to use more evidence and clear language in my writing." Another student added, "Rubrics helps me understand what I need to do to improve my work." Two students stated rubrics highlight next steps in the writing process for us.
- The STAR Reading assessment is administered three times a year to measure reading level growth, guide selection of independent reading books and help students develop individual reading goals. Additionally, students take *Accelerated Reader* quizzes after each book they complete. The results help teachers and students track reading performance week-by-week.

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

Teacher teams engage in structured professional collaborations that strengthen teacher instructional capacity. Distributed leadership structures are in place to allow for teachers to play an integral role in school decisions.

Impact

Distributed leadership structures and professional collaborations promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning standards and instructional shifts resulting in improved teacher instructional practice and increased student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly and develop instructional support structures including a protocol for examining student work. Team notes and supplemental materials to support student progress are produced as well. Meetings focus on using student data from varied assessments to determine student learning needs and develop strategies to support active engagement and academic achievement. Additionally, grade leaders participate in instructional cabinet meetings and facilitate the work with vertical and horizontal grade teams. This practice results in a coherent curriculum across grades and content areas.
- Common preps are strategically embedded in staff schedules to allow teachers to meet in a variety of configurations. Curriculum team members collaborate to develop and revise curriculum on an ongoing basis to meet the needs of current students. Curriculum team members also share and inform varied best practices at team meetings and through inter-visitations. Grade and Content Team members are able to identify common understandings and misunderstandings through analysis of students work as a basis for differentiation and re-teaching.
- During the 8th grade English language arts team meeting, teachers used the school wide protocol for analyzing student work and strategies for close reading and writing organization. Teachers engaged in an inquiry cycle that takes place for about six-weeks following the administration of a pre-assessment test or task prior to a unit of study. Teachers analyzed the post-assessments to gauge student understanding of specific skills taught in the unit on implications for instruction. The team discussed students in quartile one and noted misconceptions on the student work protocol summary sheet. For the following week, the team’s agenda was to focus on sharing their best practices to support claims for either side of a stance referencing the class text and designing small group lessons.
- The school provides multiple opportunities for staff to take leadership roles including participating as team, curriculum or content facilitators as well as in a variety of short-term initiatives. Currently, all curriculum leaders have moved up “through the ranks” to their leadership positions. Leadership positions include Grade Head, Coaches, Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Program, Peer Instructional Coaches and Demonstration Teachers. In addition, the hiring committee consists of both administrators and teachers.