



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Technology, Arts and Sciences Studio

Middle School M301

**185 First Avenue
New York
NY 10003**

Principal: George Morgan

Date of review: November 12, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

The School Context

Technology, Arts and Sciences Studio is a middle school with 149 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 24% Black, 62% Hispanic, 3% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 35% 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 90.8%.

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	Focus	Developing
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	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	Additional Findings	Developing
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
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Findings

Teachers meet productively in grade-level and department teams with clear protocols for unit planning and examining student assessment results. There is strong teacher collaboration within Integrated Co-Teaching partnerships and Team Leaders have input on student goals and key school decisions.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved instructional planning with support from the network's literacy coach. Teacher leader roles, such as the department team leaders, dean, and guidance counselor, assume major instructional and organizational responsibilities that enhance teacher leadership capacities and elevate shared decision making to ensure progress of student goals across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams review student assessment data and then adjust instructional decisions. For example, during a science team meeting observed, teachers considered item analysis from a recent 8th grade genetics test and then supplemented upcoming units of study with re-teaching of certain concepts that many students misunderstood. Similarly, the English language arts (ELA) teachers used Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) assessment data to then form an intervention group of students who will receive pull-out support.
- Team leaders represent all major content areas and take primary responsibility for facilitating team meetings, setting agendas, uploading minutes to a newly-developed shared Google drive, and providing input on professional development plans and offerings.
- Every class at the school is set up as an Integrated Co-Teaching partnership between general education and special education teachers. Teachers stated that they have a high degree of trust, learning and confidence in their co-teachers, and new teachers expressed relief at the mentoring they receive in the partnerships.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Curricula and academic tasks are in the process of aligning to Common Core Learning Standards. Despite an instructional focus on attaining higher levels of rigor, there is inconsistency across classrooms in planning challenging and differentiated tasks.

Impact

There is not yet coherence in curricula and academic tasks to ensure all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, have opportunities to demonstrate their thinking thereby promoting for college and career readiness across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers acknowledge that the Expeditionary Learning units of study lack sufficient writing assignments, yet there has been no attempt to develop a writing curriculum map. There was little evidence of vertical planning of writing assignments, genres, and expected outcomes. The kick-off writing assignment for the start of the school year for students in 6th, 7th and 8th grades were to write a descriptive letter entitled “The Amazing One” to a peer. In 6th grade, students completed the writing assignment with several drafts, edits and revisions, and a published version that received teacher feedback, rubric score, and self-reflection. However, in the 8th grade, students completed this same writing assignment at a lower level of expectation, minimal writing process, and no basis for evaluation.
- Students engaged to a good extent in all class lessons and they spoke about several meaningful projects, including last year’s Science Fair. Yet a number of academic tasks in classes lacked rigor and appeared as “busy work,” such as students copying verbatim lines of a poem into their notebooks and cutting and taping ten strips of genetic code papers.
- The school selected Connected Math Project (CMP3) as its math core curricula last year, yet there was no evidence of this math curricula being implemented. Instead, math teachers utilize their own materials and ask students to paste daily worksheets into their math notebooks. Much of the teacher-created materials align well with Common Core Learning Standards expectations, including demonstrating multiple strategies to problem solve and explain thinking. However, there was no differentiation of assignments, so all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, were asked to solve the same problems and some waited for others to complete the tasks.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching practices across the school reflect shared beliefs in developing students' skills to ensure the engagement and participation by all learners.

Impact

While there is a commitment to facilitate discussions instead of direct student learning, teachers vary in their actual levels of student-centered instruction. There are inconsistencies in teachers' levels of questioning, rigor of instruction, and differentiation strategies which results in uneven levels of student thinking and engagement across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a long-standing partnership with Lincoln Center Institute and teachers receive professional development in the capacities for imaginative learning as a strategy for helping students notice deeply and make connections. This approach has become a common language and belief system for all teachers at the school and informs instructional planning.
- Teachers utilize a range of visual, auditory, and tactile activities to engage the multiple learning styles of all students. For example, there was use of animated Greek deity and read-aloud of poem in ELA classes and pulleys and rope in science class. Despite good attention to multi-sensory supports and ample examples of scaffolds, such as graphic organizers and mentor texts, few curricula extensions and no differentiated assignments were evident in class visits to push the learning of higher performing students.
- In most classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions by responding to teacher-generated questions, with only one example of students developing and responding to their own questions. Additionally, the range of teachers' questions was limited, with simple recall questions occurring more frequently than open-ended and higher level "why" questions.

Findings

The school uses common assessments in major subject areas, tracks student progress, and inconsistently applies writing rubrics and formative checks for understanding. Teachers assess and track student learning and are starting to make some adjustments to units and lessons, at the teacher team and classroom levels.

Impact

Teachers are inconsistently applying these practices or providing feedback across classrooms. As a result, students do not receive a full picture of next steps to improve their work and teachers are inconsistently targeting lessons to ensure all students' needs are met.

Supporting Evidence

- The school utilizes common assessments in major content areas, such as New York City Performance Assessments in math and ELA and weekly quizzes, which provide information on student progress. Teacher teams review assessment results and conduct item analysis for trends, which then informs lesson plans and intervention groups.
- There is some variation of tracking progress even within the same subject area. For example in one ELA class, students record how many books they have read with written book reviews as evidence, while another ELA class does not maintain this record.
- Some teachers demonstrate a range of strategies for checking students' understanding within lessons, including individual conferring, thumbs up, group discussion questions, and exit slips, while other teachers do not plan or utilize formative assessments during instruction. There is inconsistent use of rubrics to provide feedback to students on writing assignments as not all published student work receives rubric scores.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and teachers communicate mostly high expectations to students and families about personal behaviors and academic achievement. There is evidence of grade inflation evident in summative evaluations of both students and staff.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations produce a positive and increasingly rigorous learning environment for students connected to college and career readiness, yet there is not always sufficient accountability built into evaluative feedback.

Supporting Evidence

- There is positive school culture among school leader, teachers, staff, parents, and students such that all stakeholders express high satisfaction with levels of respectful interactions and trust. Many individuals talk about the small school as their "home away from home" community. Staff encourage new students' personal development through a 6th grade advisory and yoga program, as well as school-wide incentives like honor roll rewards, perfect attendance celebrations, and section sheet awards.
- All the teachers received evaluative ratings of "Effective" and "Highly Effective" of their teaching practice in 2013-14. Similarly, according to the most recent 2012-13 Progress Report, the percentage of students passing courses in major subject areas at the school exceeds City-wide averages. However, these students have lower credit accumulation than City-wide averages when they reach ninth grade in high school, indicating inconsistent levels of high school readiness.
- Teachers maintain students' assessment results and assignment completion on the Jupiter electronic grading program. Students and parents log in to access this updated information which includes regular progress reports and they express satisfaction that the Jupiter grades improves home-school communication.