



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

NYC Lab Middle School for Collaborative Studies

Middle School M312

**333 West 17th Street
New York
NY 10011**

Principal: Dr. Megan Adams

Date of review: March 25, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Lucia Perez-Medina

The School Context

NYC Lab Middle School for Collaborative Studies is a middle school with 554 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 2% Black, 7% Hispanic, 38% White, and 45% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 98.0%.

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	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 of the Danielson's Framework for Teaching to staff and successfully partner with families to communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

These structures have resulted 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 list of clear expectations and has built a support structure to ensure these expectations are met. These relate to ways of working both in and out of the classroom setting. These expectations are communicated through school-wide meetings, smaller collaborative meetings, online communication tools and individualized, differentiated feedback. The Danielson Framework for Teaching has proven a valuable tool in helping administrator's articulate expectations for classroom practice, professionalism and planning. Teachers stated that this framework has helped them set a high standard for professional practice.
- Families are invited to a number of workshops and meetings like orientation, grade specific meetings at the beginning of the year, Curriculum Night, and ongoing conferences to facilitate their engagement with the school and to build partnerships in support of their students. They also have a multi-year high school application process that the guidance department leads with families. This process has resulted in a 99% high school placement for students in the first round of applications.
- The school offers a rigorous academic experience which helps set the culture of learning in the school. All 8th grade courses either lead to high school credit or have earned the high school preparedness distinction. On the School Quality Report they out performed both the city-wide and district averages with the 99% of students on track for high school graduation.
- Students and families are given explicit, high expectations that they are expected to meet. These are communicated through the school's core values of Collaboration, Compassion, Diversity & Pluralism and Academic Rigor. Students and families are also provided copies of the curriculum maps and curriculum letters for each course. Parents stated that these tools help them understand what the students will be studying and the requirements of the course.
- The school communicates expectations for learning via staff email, weekly calendar, department point and grade point people and committees. All minutes are communicated in google docs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across most classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and academic tasks and immerse students in rigorous work that foster higher-order thinking. However, strategic entry points, high quality supports for diverse learners, and student discussions that prompt rich thinking vary across subject areas.

Impact

Most students demonstrate higher-order thinking yet some lessons did not fully demonstrate refinements of instructional strategies, including questioning and discussion techniques that ensure strategic entry points into the curricula, thus limiting student ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- During an 8th grade math lesson, students worked in partnerships to solve real-world math problems. Students chose a method and solved for one and then two variables. Students with disabilities had access to a checklist of steps for solving systems of equations to support them with the task. Students engaged in peer-to-peer discussions about their partner's work. However, strategic entry points, discussions, and high quality supports that lead to student ownership are not yet consistent across the vast majority of classrooms.
- In three out of seven classrooms visited, all students worked on the same task with some variation in approaches in some instances. Differentiation or extensions of tasks to maximize student learning was evident in some classrooms. A grade 6 science task required students to interpret sound decibel charts and a case study to determine individuals at risk for noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) and identify risks and rank levels of risks. Students then had to provide evidence to support the explanations of the rank and create a plan for individuals with NIHL. One group of students had access to a modified case study for support. There was also an extension activity available for students requiring students to compare their own noise risk level to the case studies. These students made a list of strategies to decrease their own risk of noise induced hearing loss and then plotted a line graph of the data and used the graph to determine the maximum time for noise.
- During a humanities lesson, students had to choose a section of *Xmas Tree* and analyze what the main character is thinking or feeling. In groups, students had to create a paper model and include the narration, thought bubbles with headlines, and a realization. The texts available in colored folders were leveled to support a range of learners; however students worked quietly with minimal opportunities to discuss their learning in groups.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data so that a diversity of learners have curricular access and are cognitively engaged.

Impact

Across disciplines, curricula are refined and provide access to diverse learners to engage in challenging tasks that support college and career readiness expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Most lessons and academic tasks include the integration of the instructional shifts across subject areas. For example, an eighth grade humanities task required students to read a chapter of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and analyze character's development using evidence from the text. The task required students to represent the meaning of the scene and the character's experiences both visually and with written evidence and analysis.
- Some academic tasks provided additional support for students with disabilities to have access to cognitively challenging texts. For example, one science task required students to interpret data charts and a case study to identify important factors, summarize associated risks, and create an action plan. Students had to provide evidence to support their findings and conclusions. Two different color-coded tasks were available to accommodate ability levels.
- The special education teachers and English language learners (ELL) coordinator created a unit lesson planning guide with supports and modifications in humanities, math and science to support students with disabilities with their individual needs and shared this guide with teachers for planning purposes; however, most the lesson plans reviewed didn't incorporate these supports instead included behavioral supports and check-ins with individual students.
- A review of the high school algebra unit for advanced 8th graders outlines higher-order thinking questions like "How do we analyze numeric patterns and apply properties of sequencing to relevant situations?" and "How do we manipulate algebraic expressions with exponents?"
- A few lesson plans viewed included an extension activity. For example, a 7th grade science lesson required students that completed task to determine the type of rock most prevalent under New York City and explain where most sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks are found and why.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned to the school's curricula. Checks for understanding, student self-assessments, and actionable feedback to students are evident across classrooms.

Impact

Teachers use assessment data to make effective adjustments to meet student needs and most students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Jupiter Grades, 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. In addition, parents can access the online grading system to review their children's performance during the year.
- Checks for understanding were observed in some classrooms and teachers circulated and documented student learning. For example, in one class a teacher said "show me thumbs up if you know what you are going to do next?" In another class, teacher asked "How do you know? Turn-and-share with your partners" and then checked in to hear student responses.
- Most work in student's folders showed rubric-based performance level scores with some teacher comments. However, some student work in math showed only checkmarks. In addition, in a few student folders, there were collections of work that showed evidence of peer feedback and some evidence of teacher feedback to students to inform next steps. During the student meeting, students articulated they get feedback from their peers and that teachers give them feedback mostly in their published essays.
- The school uses a wide range of data to track student progress. These include performance assessments in math, science, and humanities, entry and exit tickets for daily lessons, in class exit projects with accompanying rubrics and checklists. Teachers use benchmark data to determine student groupings and differentiation needs.

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

All teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Distributive leadership structures are embedded for effective teacher leadership.

Impact

The inclusion of all staff in a multitude of teams empowers all teachers to assume responsibility for collectively improving teacher practice and to be involved in school level decision-making that impact student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in both content teams and grade teams. In addition, multiple collaborative teams meet on a weekly basis or on a rotating schedule. Some teams are clusters of teachers teaching the same course which meet two or three times a week during common planning time to plan and align curriculum. In addition, there is a new teacher and Digital Ready team to support integration of technology into instruction. Furthermore, there are a few self-selected collaborative groups or special initiatives groups which meet monthly. All these teams are facilitated by teachers.
- Departments meet bi-monthly to engage in a Collaborative Assessment Conference protocol. These discussions are structured around a model of Reflective Process and focus on particular skills that the department has identified as areas of high-need based on student data. For example, the humanities department is looking at use of evidence in argumentative writing. These discussions also continually inform planning and classroom practice.
- During a math teacher team meeting, teachers discussed the 7th grade unit assessment results. The assessment was analyzed using the collaborative assessment conference protocol, where teachers described the work, asked the presenting teacher questions, and discussed implications for teaching and learning. The presenting teacher decided to stretch the unit for an additional week to ensure student mastery on expressions.
- The school has a strong distributive leadership model. 100% of teachers are engaged in a leadership role and lead all instructional teams. For example, teachers lead various committees like Professional Learning, grade reform, or are part of the Teacher Leadership program. During the teacher interview, teachers expressed that they are empowered to play an integral role in school key decisions that affect student learning.