



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School

Elementary M318

**276 West 151st St
Manhattan
NY 10039**

Principal: Dawn Brooks DeCosta

**Date of review: March 31, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Mark Ossenheimer**

The School Context

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School is an elementary school with 219 students from grade kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 80% Black, 15% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% multi-racial, and 3% other students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.0%.

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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff regarding the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path of career and college readiness to families.

Impact

The culture for learning based on high expectations results in mutual accountability among the staff, and a partnership with families to support student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Leadership established the TMALS Cohesive Best Practices Checklist, which is a document capturing clear non-negotiable expectations connected to all four domains of the Danielson Framework that include items such as the use of accountable talk, data folders, data conferences with students, and teacher team work. Teachers in subject areas developed a supplemental checklist of non-negotiables for teaching practices instituted across grades. For example, the math department teachers agreed that all classrooms would display and use a common problem-solving strategy: CUBE Method in lower grades and the Poly Method in the upper grades.
- During the teacher meeting, a teacher stated, “We hold ourselves and each other accountable” to the school’s instructional expectations. The group of teachers cited substantial peer-to-peer feedback from school walk-throughs, examining student work, and inter-visitations. Teachers said that the level of feedback in various forms from each other led to greater school-wide coherency and implementation of best practices.
- Parents listed many forms of communication they receive from teachers and the school regarding their children’s progress that included email, phone calls, texting, and face-to-face conferences. The school’s teachers lead the extended day program, which provides more time available for parents to communicate with teachers. Parents also described a system for homework that asks parents to place a specific mark next to questions or problems with which the student struggled, and next to ones the parents had a difficult time understanding themselves. This allows teachers to see questions that may capture student misunderstanding or growth, as well as out-reach to the parents regarding their confusion to better support them support their children at home.
- The school has a deep commitment to the arts, culturally relevant instruction, and students’ social emotional growth. Parents are partners in these initiatives as exemplified by the Yale Institute, a program that teaches children, families, and faculty social emotional awareness and growth. Every class has written a collaborative charter that describes how they want to feel in the classroom, what they will do as a class community to feel that way, and how they will handle conflict when it arises. A color-coded ruler helps students understand where they are on an emotional level that they reflect on throughout the day. As part of these workshops, children and their families also create charts for their home environment and use the color code at home when talking about their emotional well-being.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned with the curricula and reflect the Common Core instructional shifts. Teaching strategies including questioning and scaffolds provide multiple entry points into the curricula across most classrooms.

Impact

Teaching practices are aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and students are engaged in challenging tasks demonstrating higher order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Students in a grade 2 class were using text-based evidence from *Charlotte's Web* during a class discussion that included teacher generated scaffolded questions from lower level comprehension questions to higher predictive and analysis questions. Students responded to the teacher citing page number and paragraphs as they identified where in the text they were basing their answer. Students would follow, agree, and disagree by pointing to evidence from different parts of the chapter. At one point in the observation, the teacher had students turn to a partner and share their thinking regarding a question so that all students had the opportunity to share before transitioning back to a whole class discussion.
- An observed math lesson had students strategically grouped with tiered tasks based on performance levels. All students were solving word problems involving the addition and subtraction of mixed numbers that required students write out their process. There were three different word problems divided among the five groups with tiered tasks unique to each table. For example, one word problem involved determining the amount of fabric needed for the male and female lead performers in the school play, however the higher level group solved for the both the male and female leads comparing results, while the other group solved for the male lead actors. A different math class however did not have tiered tasks for a geometry lesson that was a hands-on activity of building a square meter structure. It had no extensions so that students who had finished were waiting for periods of time until the entire class had completed the task, resulting in a missed opportunity to deepen students' thinking.
- An observed social studies lesson used leveled texts on topics from China and India across four different groups of students. Each group task involved analyzing the texts to write from different points of view, as well as sequence events, with entry points provided by the leveled texts, pictures, and vocabulary according to reading levels, resulting in appropriate levels of challenge and engagement. However, a different observed social studies class, while having a tiered task of two options, both were of lower levels on the Depth of Knowledge asking students to either list the uses of silver or draw a mining town in New Spain using the textbook. While i-Pads were available for students to use for additional sources, observed students were seeking images of "mines" but they were neither silver mines or from New Spain resulting in missed application of knowledge.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions ensure coherent curricula across grades and subjects with embedded tasks that provide accessible for a diversity of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Ready Gen, Go Math, FOSS Science, and the New York City social studies scope and sequence as baseline Common Core curricula that are then revised and developed further to incorporate the school's instructional foci, such as integrating character building, emotional intelligence, and the arts, across subjects and classes. For example, curricula across all grades share monthly Character Traits embedded into unit plans that integrate with read a louds, poems, and other texts. School-wide, the trait of "compassion and kindness" is the trait planned of November, and "leadership" for December.
- Unit plans demonstrate explicit planning for Common Core instructional shifts that include identified anchor texts, tasks aligned to Webb's Depth of Knowledge to ensure rigor, as well as accountable talk, reciprocal teaching, and Socratic seminar, as tools to engage students within content to deepen their thinking. For example, a review of the second grade curricula demonstrates that there is an ongoing plan how to teach accountable talk while embedding it into the various units. September starts with an introduction to the habits of accountable talk, for October students are practicing using accountable talk stems, which is built upon in November when the second grade students begin to build on one another's ideas in structured discussions.
- A review of lesson plans indicates teachers regularly adjust tasks based on both student data, including Fountas and Pinell, STAR Reading for leveled texts, and STAR Math., and also on students' written work. Lesson planning reflects including the use of graphic organizers, outlines, math manipulatives, and scaffolded questions using the Depth of Knowledge in order to provide all learners with accessibility to tiered tasks that are in alignment with the content standards. Students were able to articulate that teachers place them in groups based on their reading, math, and thinking levels. Consequently, not only do students wind up sitting in several different academic groupings on a daily basis, but groupings are flexible and change over time.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms teachers use assessments and rubrics aligned with the school’s curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Assessments aligned to the curricula provide teachers with and allow them to provide actionable feedback to students. . Assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Fountas and Pinell, STAR reading, STAR Math, Go Math unit exams, Rally Coach, Ready Gen performance, and the New York City Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) across grades to provide information on student progress across subjects and grades. Assessment results are kept in individual student data folders that hold last year’s data and current data to show year-to-year progress. Teachers conference with students regarding the ongoing data updates so students understand growth, goals, and next steps.
- Student work posted in classrooms and in work folders demonstrated the use of school wide rubrics in ELA, social studies, and math, with extensive narrative feedback that included next learning steps and a written reflection from the student. For example, a math writing task had feedback from the teacher indicating that next time the student should include more math vocabulary in the explanation of how he solved the problem. The student responded on a different colored post-it addressing the feedback. In the student interview, five out of six students had tasks from their binders with rubric-based feedback. Students stated they use rubrics throughout a task because “the rubric tells us what good work is.”
- Data revealed that students showed progress in fluency and number sense, however struggled with short and extended response questions within math across grades. Teachers used this data to make adjustments in this year’s curriculum plan across grades to incorporate more emphasis on the problem-solving process. There are now math writing tasks across grades and a school wide math rubric in use across all grades, creating coherency of instruction and deeper student understanding of math concepts.
- The school uses data to determine individual student placement and needed support in the extended day program administered by The After School Cooperation (TASC). Consequently, the school is able to provide targeted instructional supports and extensions to students as additional services from their school day using the data systems and assessment information.

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

Teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote school wide goals and distributed leadership. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work.

Impact

Professional collaborations on teams promote the strengthening of instructional capacity of teachers and progress toward goals for groups of students. Leadership structures provide teachers with a voice in key school decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has established professional learning communities (PLCs) as part of the professional development process. There have been two cycles so far this year. Teachers identify four to five areas of learning connected to classroom practice and the school’s goals. Teachers select which group to be a member of and collaborate to identify texts, practices, and inter-visitations among PLC members to apply in classrooms what the group was learning. For example, PLCs have centered on hands-on math instruction and discussion techniques, both school goals connected to the Common Core instructional shifts.
- A third grade teacher presented student work at the grade level team meeting using the school-wide adopted *Looking at Student Work Protocol*. The student was chosen because he is a representative of the school wide trend of demonstrating proficiency in math computation, but struggling in extended response questions. The team analyzed the work, the student’s previous success and progress, and then the possible struggle points the student had with the task. The team then developed sentence starters for math to be used in a graphic organizer to be used by this student, as well as a planned instructional activity for all students to be able to use the rubric for peer feedback. Teachers stated that they would examine the same student’s work for the next math extended response assessment to measure the effectiveness of the strategies developed.
- The majority of teachers are in a leadership role as part of their professional responsibilities. Teachers and staff lead grade teams, subject teams, the professional development team, the inquiry team, the Response to Intervention (RTI) team, and participate in the School Cabinet that meets weekly. In addition, teachers lead the extended learning program, social emotional support program called RULER in conjunction with Yale University, serve as the Data Coach, and as Lab Teachers for the Ready Gen program that opens their classrooms to visiting teachers from other schools to share their best practices.