Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry

Middle School M328

401 West 164 Street
Manhattan
NY 10032

Principal: Olga Quiles

Date of review: May 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Manuel Ramirez

The School Context

Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry is a middle school with 292 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 11% Black, 87% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 40% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 67% of the students enrolled and girls account for 33%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Celebration**	**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**	**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**	**Proficient**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Administrators and staff ensure that the school curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Teachers use data and student work to plan and refine curricula and academic tasks.

Impact
All students have access to Common Core aligned curricula with academic tasks that are designed to be engaging and supportive of college and career readiness skills for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has aligned the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards in all content areas for grades 6-8, with the goal of promoting college and career readiness. The principal, math coach, and teacher leaders chose *Engage NY* as their math curriculum for grades 6-8. The school's decision to adapt the online units of study from *Engage NY* promotes collaborative planning, coherence across grades and vertical alignment.

- Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using students' work. For example, after a review of the New York State item analysis report comparing the school average to city average on the 6th through 8th grade Reading Standards, teacher teams decided to revise some of the units of study in literacy. An eighth grade poetry unit was adjusted by including in each lesson, prompts to incorporate students' prior knowledge, differentiation for high and low students, additional texts to facilitate emergent bilingual students' understanding, and revision of teaching points.

- Student work in classrooms visited and tasks displayed on bulletin boards outside the classrooms evidenced alignment of curricula to Common Core Standards and content standards, across content areas. In addition, tasks evidenced rigorous habits and higher order skills. For example, for a science task, students were asked to create a 3D model of a human body system of their choice and complete a research task about its organs and functions. The task involved the use of a graphic organizer, classwork rubric, and domain specific vocabulary, and students had different modes to engage with the learning and present the content to peers.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, pedagogical practices inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact
In most classrooms, students were not consistently engaged in appropriately challenging tasks or discussions requiring high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Although students were working collaboratively across all classrooms visited, ample student to student discussion, use of academic language and evidence based accountable talk inconsistently supported students in demonstrating higher order thinking skills. In an eighth grade math class, students were asked to compare and order rational and irrational numbers, using a number line. Students were observed working on completing a worksheet and the teacher asked them to solve only one question on the activity sheet. The task was not differentiated and students were not invited to reflect on or engage in discussions to explain their thinking.

- School leadership stated that the instructional focus for the year was on increasing the level of student engagement in all classrooms. However, in seven out of eight classrooms observed, lessons were teacher dominated with no student-to-student discussions, and tasks given to students did not require them to construct meaning for themselves or to think critically. In an eighth grade reading class, students were asked to peer edit a literary essay and provide written feedback to their partner, using a peer review guide. Students had a difficult time and seemed confused about moving their desks to face each other to complete the task. Different entry points to support the diverse learning needs of the students in the class were not evident.

- A review of teaching documents and lesson plans provided evidence of teachers' content knowledge and understanding of different teaching strategies to support all learners; however in some classrooms visited, students were not cognitively challenged with the tasks. For example, in an eighth grade math class students were observed using a number line and tape to find the square root of numbers with fractions and decimals. There were limited opportunities for students to think and reflect to deepen their understanding about the content. A few students dominated the discussion, limiting the opportunity for other students to intellectually engage in the discussions. There was little evidence of students justifying their thinking and using mathematical practices in problem solving.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school uses common assessments aligned to the curricula to provide feedback on student performance. Teachers consistently use checks for understanding at the classroom level to make instructional adjustments.

Impact
The school's assessment systems and structures result in effective monitoring of student progress and address the learning needs of all students. Teachers' use of ongoing checks for understanding support student achievement across grade and content areas.

Supporting Evidence

- To assess students' performance across content areas, the school uses performance based assessments from the school curricula, Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR), Gates-MacGinitie Scoring Test, New York State Measures Of Student Learning assessments, and computer-based assessments such as Achieve 3000, I-Ready, and Accelerated Math and Reader, that make data immediately available to teachers, administrators and students. Assessments also include teacher-created formative and summative assessments. Literacy skills and discourse are assessed on a daily basis through conferring with students and this information is used to form groups and drive small group instruction. Weekly assessments in the other content areas are given to students and the information gathered through these assessments is used for planning additional support for students during and after school.

- A review of lesson plans and classroom observations revealed that teachers regularly use checks for understanding and promote student self-assessment to advance learning. For example, in a lesson for a seventh grade literacy class the teacher checked for understanding by using an exit slip with a question. During classroom observations it was noted that the use of exit slips and rubrics is a school-wide practice. This was evidenced by students' work products that included reflection sheets completed by the students as they engaged in self-assessment of their performance on tasks across content areas.

- The school has developed a common understanding regarding the purpose and characteristics of rubrics that are used across grades. Further, a review of students' work on bulletin boards inside and outside classrooms indicates that teachers use rubrics and student reflection logs to assess students' performance on writing tasks and consistently provide feedback to students. For example, using a rubric that showed four-point performance levels on "geometric transformation", math teachers provided students with content specific feedback on their performance of the task and students' work demonstrated students' self-assessment via written reflections.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and staff consistently embed high expectations in all aspects of school operations, focusing on teachers' mastery of expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and parents' understanding of college and career readiness expectations for their children.

Impact
Systems and structures that communicate and support high expectations for teaching and learning across the school create accountability amongst all stakeholders, for staff and students to achieve the expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff through daily supervisory visits and actionable feedback given to all staff, using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The administrative team is involved in all professional development activities on a weekly and monthly basis to support teachers in shared understanding of the school's expectations for teaching and learning. Weekly professional development activities focus on the school wide instructional focus, which is student engagement. The principal holds the staff accountable for these expectations by reviewing lesson plans and providing feedback, especially when recommendations are not visible in daily instruction.

- School leaders provide the staff with a handbook which delineates expectations for teaching and learning at the school. These expectations are in direct alignment with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and Learning and the New York City Department of Education's Instructional Expectations. The school also provides teachers with articles from the Institute for Learning, on "Accountable Talk", in alignment with the school's instructional focus. Lesson plans collected during classroom visits and others presented by the leadership, evidenced the school's expectations related to daily instruction. They include teaching points, strategies for active engagement, guided, independent and whole group work, and differentiated tasks and instructional approaches to create multiple entry points for all students to be fully engaged in learning activities across content areas and grades.

- Parents reported that the school consistently communicates with them through phone calls, texts, e-mails and Skedula, an online system that tracks students' assignments and grades. The school has provided workshops for parents on how to use this online system to understand and stay informed about their children's progress. The workshops are presented by the principal, assistant principal, teachers, and guest speakers throughout the year, on topics such as the Common Core Learning Standards, college and career readiness, high school admissions, curriculum supports, and parenting health. Additionally, the school sends out monthly calendars of upcoming events that further help to inform families of school goals and expectations.

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

Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry based professional collaborations to improve teaching and learning across the school. Leadership structures give opportunities for teachers to play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Impact
The work of teacher teams contributes to improved teacher pedagogy. Teachers' participation in key decision making centered on curricula and instruction facilitates success on school wide goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. The school has structured times for teachers to meet daily, weekly and bi-monthly, by grade or department. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are regularly scheduled for meetings on Monday afternoons for 80 minutes, with teachers using an "Inquiry Model" to collaboratively plan for effective instruction in all content areas and grades. Through these meetings, teachers are provided with opportunities to engage in weekly planning to design and implement learning tasks that promote high levels of student thinking and participation. For example, teachers develop standards-based rubrics to engage students in assessing their work. During a team meeting, the teachers were observed reviewing student work. The team meeting was guided by meeting norms, an agenda and a protocol for looking at student work.

- Teacher teams meet regularly to plan curriculum, share strategies learned in staff development and workshops, and look at student work, using a protocol for inquiry. They look at student work regularly, to support students in meeting the expectations of the Common Core Standards and instructional shifts. Teachers also meet in teams to examine student data that is then utilized to adjust instruction to meet students' needs. A review of unit plans and lesson plans revealed adjustments made to units, such as teaching more academic vocabulary daily, using a range of literature and informational texts at varying degrees of text complexity in daily instruction, and employing close reading strategies for reading comprehension tasks.

- Meetings with teachers revealed that they regularly contribute to the school's instructional decisions and have a voice in key decisions that positively impact student learning and school-wide goals. Teacher leaders turn-key information from workshops focusing on developing instructional practices aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school's instructional focus. For example, the school has four lead teachers who work with individual teachers and grade teams to develop and/or revise curricula, assessments, rubrics, checklists, units of study and lesson plans. Lead teachers also model lesson delivery and provide peers with feedback aligned to Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Meetings of the various Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) across the staff are also led by teachers.