



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Manhattan School for Children**

**Elementary-Middle M333**

**154 West 93rd Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10025**

**Principal: Claire Lowenstein**

**Date of review: March 30, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Sandra Litrico**

## The School Context

Manhattan School for Children is an elementary/middle school with 771 students from grade kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 12% Black, 63% Hispanic, 17% White, 06% Asia and 2% multi-cultural students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

The school has a rigorous and clearly articulated approach to interdisciplinary curriculum, which is aligned with Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and incorporates the instructional shifts. The curriculum promotes college and career readiness skills through a focus on real world learning experiences that emphasize higher-order thinking.

### Impact

All students have a range of opportunities to build skills and dig deeply into important topics within coherent curricula across grades that promotes college and career readiness. Students are engaged in challenging tasks that require them to think, reflect and problem solve.

### Supporting Evidence

- All grades use Teachers College (TC) reading and writing units of study, which are CCLS aligned. The staff continuously revises curriculum units to ensure they integrate the instructional shifts and make modifications to address students' needs. For example, after analyzing data and visiting classrooms, the principal and staff decided that the writing tasks for grades 3, 4 and 5 could be more rigorous. As a result, the TC coach and teachers have made revisions in the curriculum tasks to ensure that students are engaged and challenged.
- There is a cross-curricular skill emphasis in content area instruction. Annotation, use of text evidence, craft and academic vocabulary is included in all units of study.
- This year the K-5 math curriculum transitioned to EngageNY to ensure CCLS alignment. In the grade one unit on Operations and Algebraic Thinking students are involved in investigations as they interpret and solve addition story problems and use synchrony and one to one tagging as strategies. In middle school curriculum units are planned with CMP3. In all grades students are being taught to use different mathematical models, justify their reasoning and revise and push each other's thinking.
- All curriculum units push students thinking through high level questioning and discussion. In the grade 8 social studies unit on The Great Depression students participate in a fish bowl activity. Students engage in a discussion evaluating if the Great Depression was an inevitable consequence of the prosperity of the 1920s. The unit on the Constitution and Bill of Rights asks students to assess if the system of checks and balances provide our nation with an efficient and effective government or if it makes the government work too slowly. Students have to provide examples to support their claims. In another task, students are asked to ponder the following: "The US Constitution is called a living document" Decide if you believe that this is accurate or if it is not. Provide at least two examples to support your position.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use a broad range of assessment data that are aligned with the schools curricula to determine students' progress and to inform instructional planning and interventions for students

### Impact

The schools common approach to reviewing assessments provides teachers with a clear portrait of student's strengths and areas of need, which lead to strategic adjustments in instructional planning and targeted interventions. There is a good consistency with how teachers collect, analyze and share feedback with students and other teachers as they adjust lessons based on data. The use of ongoing checks for student understanding, however, is not consistently evidenced across the vast majority of classrooms.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school wide goal this year is to create, administer and analyze data from assessments in all subjects in order to adjust curricular and teaching and meet the needs of all students. There is evidence of this in many classrooms through small group instruction and scaffolds including graphic organizers, leveled texts and checklists.
- The principal collects and analyzes all student data. She conducts data talks with teachers and uses the information for Response to Intervention (RTI) process to ensure that students receive Tier 1 and 2 interventions. There is an RTI spreadsheet that is reviewed regularly and contains targeted students names, point person, Tier 1 start date, response/follow-up, Tier 2 and next steps. The principal has set goals based on student data and teacher observations.
- Teachers use common formal and informal assessments and students engage in self-assessment. These include state tests, teachers college and Fountas and Pinell running records, unit of study assessments, rubrics and checklists. Informal assessments such as conferencing, observations during guided reading groups and small group work. In addition, checklists, entry tickets and exit tickets, reading and writing notebook reviews and advisory provide additional information on student progress.
- National Coalition for Core Arts Standards are followed in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Drama class and assessed through the Theatre Model Cornerstone Assessment. . Students use physical and vocal characterization to interpret through planned improvisation, a scene from a work of literature taught and assessed including vocabulary, group collaboration, critical evaluation and focus/concentration.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Teacher practices reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best which is based on students' immersion in challenging real-world learning tasks and meaningful student discussions. Instructional strategies and scaffolds for students are consistent across classrooms, allowing students to access learning in a meaningful way.

### Impact

Students are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. Effective questioning and routines provide all students access to the curricula, extend their higher order thinking skills, and promote rigor and ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school core belief is that all children are gifted in multiple ways and teachers organize the curriculum thematically using an open ended, interdisciplinary, project based approach. As a result, teachers act as facilitators of learning. Students are given opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment. Teachers ask high level questions to promote student driven conversations and assign learning tasks that include research, investigations and real life experiences.
- In the math lessons observed teachers provided open-ended investigations and hold "Math Congress" shares where students presented and defended their thinking and engaged in discussions. The teacher used a turn and talk strategy in which students explained their reasoning and questioned the reasoning of their partner.
- In the science lesson, the objective was to identify and test variables that affect airplane flight. Students worked in lab groups figuring out the minimum number of winds needed to fly the plane they had created the length of the clothesline. Challenges were posted with high-level questions including " Is there a relationship between the variable you investigated and the flight of your plane? Students had to observe, measure and record data. During the lesson, the teacher observed and questioned students and assessed their task using a checklist for the flight investigation. All students were engaged in authentic real life learning experiences.
- In all grades observed, students were engaged in interdisciplinary units that promoted deep and authentic understanding of the topics. Teachers use Understanding by Design template when planning their lessons, Teachers use an effective co-teaching model of parallel teaching. Students in the Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom were given grade level curriculum with accommodations to help them meet standards. Related service providers plan with teachers in order to pre teach and reteach students who may be struggling.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

The school leader has effectively partnered with staff, parents and students to create a system of high learning expectations and a culture of mutual accountability for those expectations.

### **Impact**

Teachers and administrators have a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear and effective feedback to ensure that all students are independent thinkers and prepared for college and career. There are also high expectations regarding professionalism, planning curriculum and instruction.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- High expectations are clearly communicated to students. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning through practices such as fishbowl, debate and use of checklists and rubrics. The grading system was changed from a scale of 1 to 3 to a scale of 1 to 4 to recognize those exceeding the standards. Students are encouraged to aim for level 4 on each rubric to push themselves to go further. Teachers provide students with clearly laid out assignments and rubrics/checklists so that they can assess themselves and determine their next steps. The school participates in the National Junior Honor Society for 7th and 8<sup>th</sup> graders
- High expectations are communicated to teachers and are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers set professional goals at the beginning of the year. The professional learning committee works with colleagues to develop and adjust the professional development plan for the year based on the needs of teachers and their students. Administrators conduct frequent observations and provide actionable feedback to teachers to improve through pedagogy.
- The school has built a common understanding of effective behavioral supports and interventions. As part of the school wide adoption of Responsive Classroom, students worked collaboratively to develop the school rules. Effective academic and personal behaviors are normed throughout the school.
- Parents are kept abreast of the schools expectations and their child's progress. They attend curriculum night, conferences, and receive four progress reports each year. In middle school each child has an advisor. The iLearn platform and e-portfolio allows families to see student progress at all times. The school successfully partners with families to support student progress by providing meaningful feedback about their child's progress and ways they can support them at home.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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**Findings**

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based collaborations. Teacher teams are at the center of the schools professional development efforts. Teachers are involved in focused work and collaboratively analyze curriculum, classroom practice, assessment data and student work.

**Impact**

Instructional inquiry has resulted in shared improvements in teacher practice and student learning. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that impact student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The professional learning committee with representatives from all grades has developed a PD plan for the year. The school wide lens is on using formative assessments to drive instruction. Teachers worked in grade level groups to develop connections between arithmetic and algebra and help students develop mathematical reasoning. Other teachers worked in teacher teams to create effective note taking structures.
- During the present cycle teachers have developed interest-based groups all of which are addressing formative assessment. Grade teams meet weekly to engage in inquiry-based collaboration to improve student learning.
- Teachers use student work to inform their curriculum and instruction in order to meet the needs of all students. The unit plans reflect this work. The first grade team for example analyzed student work from the culminating assessment in a unit on insects to inform their goals for the next unit on pond life. They determined which skills and understandings were mastered and which needed to be revisited and used that information for planning.
- Teachers articulated that they felt empowered to have input on decisions toward the development of instructional resources across grades.