

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Quest to Learn

Secondary School M422

**351 West 18 street
Manhattan
NY 10011**

Principal: Jennifer Rygalski

**Dates of review: January 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Marisol Bradbury**

The School Context

Quest to Learn is a secondary school with 478 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 15% Black, 35% Hispanic, 40% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 70% of the students enrolled and girls account for 30%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.2%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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	Additional Findings	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.	Focus	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.	Celebration	Proficient

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:

Proficient

Findings

The principal consistently communicates the responsibility to educate the whole child using elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Workshops and performance updates inform families of student progress and expectations aligned to college and career readiness.

Impact

Expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching provides support and accountability for teachers and staff. Structures to communicate with parents offer feedback to students, resulting in clear expectations about college, career readiness and preparedness.

Supporting Evidence

- Administrators and teachers articulate the instructional focus of the school, which is based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching .These elements include instruction, communicating with students, question and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning and using assessment in instruction. During teacher teams, teachers share their work and feedback is received from the principal about their instructional practice. This helps them to improve their pedagogical skills to engage students in learning.
- The principal established classroom and environment practices. These practices include greeting students at the door, posting a do now activity on the board, opportunity for students to practice new skills, grapple with new content, and establish clear closure with formative assessment. During classroom visits and walkthroughs of the building, it was evident that teachers engaged in these practices. During conversations with students, they stated that teachers cared about them and expect them to do well and behave appropriately.
- Administrators and teachers validate and recognize the work of students. For example, the Academics All Stars event celebrates students who maintain an academic average of 85 or above. The Student of the Month assemblies for the upper and middle schools honors high achieving students as well as students who demonstrate the values of the school. In addition, the National Junior Honor Society meets regularly.
- The school has implemented a student led conference in order to offer feedback to parents while promoting student leadership and ownership of their work. Under the guidance of their teachers, students share their learning, challenges, and successes with parents. Together, they work on a plan to address the academic expectations.
- Parents stated that the school offers extensive information and resources about college and career readiness. The parent coordinator and guidance counselors offer parents and students an array of college programs. This includes internships and workshops about post-secondary preparation and college readiness. One middle school parent stated that she has learned more about college readiness at Quest than many of her friends whose children attend other high schools.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

The use of common assessments and checks for understanding to monitor student progress varies across the school and classrooms.

Impact

The school is developing structures to use the results of common assessments to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create their own unit assessments. For example, in the upper grades, some teachers create summative exams, such as document based essays aligned to Regents examinations. These examinations aim to assess content. In some of the early grades, end of unit assessments aim to assess mastery of skill and content.
- Teachers administered baseline assessments at the start of the year and at the start of the unit to assess students' skill and knowledge. Administrators articulate that this practice will expand to design and refine units of study based on baseline and post assessment data.
- The school's main partner, Institute of Play (IoP), has collaborated with New York University researchers to administer and analyze the early results after two years of data on the performance task. The data revealed significant learning gains among 8th, 9th, and 10th graders, thus providing strong evidence that these students will most likely graduate with the skills they need to succeed in college and careers. The school has not yet modified the learning experience for these students in order to challenge the highest achieving students.
- Across classrooms, teachers use do now activities to elicit prior knowledge, large group questions, observations, and exit slips. However, they inconsistently adjust the curricula to meet the learning needs for all students as evident by the inconsistent use of individualized graphic organizers, guided group practice, and independent practice. Additionally, some teachers plan weekly but fail to adjust instruction and tasks for forthcoming lessons and units.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and consistently emphasize rigorous habits for all learners across grades and subjects.

Impact

The curricular decisions integrate the instructional shifts and consistently emphasize rigorous habits of mind, promoting higher-level thinking and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers of grades 6, 7, 9, and 10 design project based units that are student driven. Through these units, students become active participants and practitioners. For example, in a 9th grade English language arts (ELA) class, students became trial judges, litigators and witnesses after a study and analysis of Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet."
- Learning games and game like tasks are designed by teachers, curriculum developers, and game designers to introduce, reinforce, and assess important skills, content standards, and Common Core Learning Standards. Students play-test these games during the early stages of design.
- The school takes an immersive, game-based approach to curriculum and instruction. The units of study are designed using a "Mission Quest" or "Mission Problem" set structure. For example, students in the 6th grade science class design an obstacle course called the Pinewood Derby. Students learn about kinetic energy, simple machines and Newton's laws of motion to fix the model. Students in the 7th grade social studies class create an illustration of a road map that shows the important events leading to the American Independence, including the progress and reversals of the American colonists' journey towards independence. Through primary and secondary sources, students present their perspective about the fight for independence.
- Teachers, curriculum developers and game designers from IoP, design learning games and game-like experiences to introduce, reinforce, assess skills and content standard. Students play a role in developing these games during the early stages of play testing.
- During a student meeting, students articulated that they learn best when engaged in projects and assignments that require research and exploration. For example, one student shared her learning from a forensic class. She was asked to analyze a crime scene, determine motive for the subjects, analyze blood spatter and fingerprint, use reading and writing strategies when researching and writing the report.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Pedagogy reflects the schools vision of learning through a game-like model and student work products reflect high levels of student thinking.

Impact

Across classrooms, teaching practices reflect and promote project based learning, thus promoting high-level student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, the self-driven students participate in small group discussion. In one ELA class, the teacher was purposeful in creating roles that promote deep conversation. To that extent, students worked in stations to hone discussion skills. Each station consisted of assuming different roles, including director, lawyer and detective. Students were responsible for contributing to the discussion, such as asking powerful questions, defending opinions and digging deeply into the text.
- Across grades and disciplines, teachers implement stations to scaffold the learning of students. For example, in one science class, students worked across five stations to identify bones in the skeleton, discover key structures and functions of the human body, differentiate and make connections about organ systems, create and model major organs in the human body.
- In a geometry class, students are assigned the reading material ahead of time. During the lesson, the teacher reinforces the content by showing a video on the topic. While some students work independently at the computers relearning the topic in order to answer three problems from the activity sheet, other student's complete additional problems from the same activity sheet.
- Across English classes, teachers engage students in Socratic seminar; assign reading during class time and as homework and engage students in the drafting process. Students stated that the drafting process helps them become stronger writers by focusing on improving their writing skills.

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

Teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Leadership structures promote capacity building and a voice for teachers to have input on key decisions.

Impact

Structures for teacher teams have resulted in an innovative approach to curriculum design and improved instruction. Distributed leadership structures build the capacity of teacher leaders and provide a voice in curriculum design aligned to student interest.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaborate in various configurations. For example, grade level teams meet two to three times per month to look at student data. Discipline-level teams meet one to two times per month to discuss vertical alignment of curriculum and instructional supports.
- The work of teacher teams has resulted in a game-based approach to curriculum and instruction.
- Teacher leaders representing the various grade and domain level teams meet regularly with the principal to discuss the progress of their respective teams, administrative responsibilities, professional development and school wide instructional initiatives related to the Danielson Framework for Teaching.
- The members of the grade-level teacher teams look at student work for struggling students. Together they identify and examine patterns and generate implications for instruction.
- The principal empowers teachers to take on leadership roles, evident by the teacher leaders, mentors, professional developer, special education coordinator and data specialist taking on vital responsibilities to support colleagues and students. Teachers stated that they feel they are empowered and have a voice in school wide initiatives.