

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Tompkins Square Middle School**

**Middle School M839**

**600 East 6<sup>th</sup> Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10009**

**Principal: Sonhando Estwick**

**Date of review: December 4, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips**

## The School Context

Tompkins Square Middle School is a middle school with 368 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 14% Black, 40% Hispanic, 19% White, and 22% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 96.2%.

## School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

| <i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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>Additional Findings</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>Area of Focus</b>       | <b>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |

### School Culture

| <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>Proficient</b> |

### Systems for Improvement

| <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>Celebration</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |

## Area of Celebration

|                           |   |                |                       |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

Every teacher is deeply engaged in genuine professional collaboration and highly effective distributed leadership that result in shared improvements in teacher practice and a long-term investment in the school.

### Impact

There is a highly democratic and consensus-based approach to school decision-making that is one of the hallmark features of the school, and there is exceptionally high teacher retention at the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have ten periods per week for department, grade level and co-teaching partnership meetings. These meetings are used to plan, share resources, adjust curricula, analyze student data, and refine and revise their teaching practice. A “coaching handbook” written by the school contains a vision and protocols for academic coaching, team roles in meetings and samples of cycles for professional learning. During the observation of the seventh grade math team, the roles were well defined so that each member of the team made a concrete contribution to the work of revising a current unit of study.
- There are thirteen teacher leaders in a total staff of thirty and, over the past five years, the teacher retention rate has averaged 94%. These teacher leaders are responsible for facilitating department and grade team meetings as well as heading up school-wide committees such as Student and Family Outreach, Master Scheduling, and Hiring. The teams utilize very effectively a range of meeting protocols that ensure equity of voice. In addition, everything is posted on Google Docs to ensure transparency of each team’s work. Teachers express their deep commitment to the school and their appreciation for the school’s mutual investment in their professional growth and opportunities to have a voice in key decisions.
- On Election Day, the entire staff participated in a “Best Practices Share Fair.” During this event, individual teachers and teacher teams presented units of study, academic coaching protocols, and assessment results and reflected as a community on the best ways to improve their practice and student outcomes. There were teacher-led workshops on such topics as accountable talk, a teacher-created math website, mindfulness practice, notebook shares and growth mindset.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

The school's beliefs about how students learn best is reflected in a strong degree of consistency of practice and quality of student work across most classrooms for the vast majority of students, though questioning and student ownership in some classrooms did not reflect the school's overall capacity in this area.

### Impact

The level of student engagement across the school was generally strong, however not all students take ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty believe that students learn best by developing their independence, engaging in robust goal setting and reflecting on their own learning. To this end, students receive one-on-one academic coaching during FLEX, a period in the middle of the day devoted to their individual goal setting and progress review. Across the majority of classrooms, students were seen engaging in activities that were relevant and high interest. Work is rarely generic and is usually connected to a real-life situation, event or person.
- In grade 7 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) math classroom, teachers engaged in parallel teaching to work with small groups. The groups attempted to sketch a scale drawing of the classroom with students taking roles such as surveyor, recorder and project manager. Teachers first modeled the difference between actual measurement and scaled measurement. The groups had different scaffolds including different graphic organizers, different levels of questioning and even a modified meter stick for students who needed more visual prompting. While this and most co-teaching classes had highly effective co-planning, leveled questions, and small group support, there was some variation of student engagement within the ICT partnerships.
- In the majority of classrooms, overall student discussion and work products were of high quality. There was only one classroom; however, in which students took full ownership of the teaching and learning by taking on the actual role of teacher to guide their fellow students. This practice reflects an aspiration for the school.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

All teachers work to ensure that every lesson, project, and unit of study in all content areas are well aligned to the demands of the Common Core Learning Standards and engaging to foster the intellectual curiosity of all learners.

### Impact

All students experience interesting and challenging exposure to content that teaches them how to think, analyze and synthesize, and prepares them for work that lies ahead in the next phases of their education.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school takes a highly reflective approach to developing curricula. They are constantly revising, even while in the midst of units of study. They have devoted much time to ensuring that their units of study in all content areas are in clear alignment with the Common Core Standards and incorporate the instructional shifts. This commitment has resulted in curricula that is coherent vertically, as well as in an interdisciplinary way. For example, the science and humanities departments have worked closely to support non-fiction reading and work in writing around claims and evidence. They use the same process charts, the same strategies and each department uses a “processing notebook” that is used by students to help them reflect on their learning in these areas.
- Noticing that students were struggling to use quotes effectively, the humanities department incorporated additional lessons and support to help students “bolster positions by adding relevant quotes.” This supported students in deepening their work around claims and evidence. They had a process chart, a graphic organizer, a checklist for using quotes effectively. In two classrooms, teachers specifically offered small group mini-lessons for students who were still struggling with the use of quotes in their writing. They had to use the strongest quote, they had to name the source and give the credentials that set that person apart as an expert, and they had to affirm the expertise. This deepened the quality of writing for all students including the English language learners and the students with disabilities.
- First as an iZone school several years ago and continuing forward, the school engages teachers and staff routinely in developing and revising curricula with particular attention to outcomes-based assessments. In doing so, teachers delve into Common Core standards and expectations and then incorporate these into curricula tasks and assessments. This then elevates the rigor and higher order skills designed into curricula across grades and subjects

**Findings**

High quality assessment practices are intertwined with how curricula are developed and refined, and how instruction is delivered and adjusted. There is continuous monitoring of student achievement, including many opportunities for students to self-assess and develop a reflective understanding of their own strengths and areas for growth.

**Impact**

There is a clear portrait of student mastery based on actionable feedback. Students are self-aware to a very high degree, enabling them to continually raise the level of challenge for themselves under the guidance of their teachers.

**Supporting Evidence**

- In a sixth grade humanities class, the teacher spoke with students about developing “essay muscles,” and the importance of multiple drafts and revisions to get to the best possible piece. The students were at varying stages of their third “flash draft” of their argumentative essays and they utilized productively their non-generic essay checklist and rubric in finalizing their writing. It was evident through brief interviews with several students that they knew with specificity what next steps would improve their written draft, as they had received useful feedback from peers, from teachers and from their self-assessments.
- Students demonstrate exceptionally high levels of understanding their mastery of skills, content, and standards. Cycles of common assessments are embedded into all units of study and the structure of academic coach as advisor empowers students to assert control and self-advocacy over their learning goals, progress markers, and achievement outcomes. Students lead conversations during parent-teacher conferences with sensible protocols for reflecting on their work and learning, and they reference their assessment data from the school’s electronic gradebook, JumpRope.
- Across classrooms, teachers used exit slips, checklists, conference notes, reading notebook shares, and rubrics specific to the tasks to make adjustments to lessons. These and other tools helped teachers pinpoint what individual students understood thoroughly or partially, which then guided instructional planning for lessons, including enrichment small groups in math.

**Findings**

The school has a culture of learning that conveys high expectations for students, staff, and families and imparts messages about college and career readiness to the whole school community.

**Impact**

Students have raised aspirations for themselves, families feel supported by the school, and teachers hold themselves to high standards, resulting in progress toward high levels of student achievement and attainment.

**Supporting Evidence**

- From the rigorous hiring process and beyond, anyone who works at the school is expected to be a learner, a reader, a problem solver and unafraid to take risks or collaborate. When the principal spoke about the school community, he stated that everyone, students and teachers alike, believes in the power of learning through a growth mindset. This was apparent during morning staff meeting, teacher team meetings, and academic coaching meetings, where conversations were focused on “can do” expressions about student learning and thinking about learning well beyond middle school years.
- Since its founding, this school has committed its admissions process and instructional program to valuing the deeper learning that comes from mixing students of different educational and socio-economic backgrounds together. School leaders and staff, therefore, discuss openly some challenges of heterogeneous grouping when they arise. For example, the school recently began offering an after school Integrated Algebra class to thirty students who pursue a high school level Regents curriculum for credit while still in eighth grade. This enrichment math group promotes opportunities for acceleration in high school, yet the demographic composition of the Algebra class does not reflect the diverse student population championed by the school. Therefore, there is thoughtful discussion about what earlier steps need to occur to prepare and support all types of learners for this academic opportunity.
- Parents spoke at great length about how the school communicates its expectations to them, both formally and informally. A school website, JumpRope online grading portal, intake Advisory meetings, as well as traditional and student-led conferences are all easily accessible sources of detailed information about what is expected of their children. Many parents also noted their children’s high engagement and one parent explained this “motivated my son to learn more.”