



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Lower Manhattan Community

Middle School M896

**26 Broadway
New York
NY 10004**

Principal: Kelly McGuire

Date of review: March 17, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Lucia Perez-Medina

The School Context

Lower Manhattan Community is a middle school with 363 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 13% Black, 21% Hispanic, 22% White, and 40% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.0%.

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	Well Developed
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	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations focused on the advancement of teacher practice and student learning. Staff members systematically communicate to students and families a well-defined and uniform set of high expectations for all students to be college and career ready, with multiple supports and structures.

Impact

The school's culture for learning creates strong partnerships with students and families, contributing to a deep understanding of school goals and expectations for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations through professional learning sessions, E-newsletters, emails, curricular planning meetings, and observation feedback sessions with teachers. In addition, teachers stated that during common planning sessions and team meetings, they constantly engage in professional dialogue and share practices that contribute to their success in the classroom. Teachers shared that school leaders support their development through frequent professional learning focused on high expectations for all students through modeling, inter-visitation, and ongoing feedback, allowing them to meet the school's rigorous set of expectations for teaching and learning. For example, one teacher team articulated how school leaders collaboratively participate in the development of unit plans and model specific teaching strategies that highlight the overarching goals of the unit.
- Teachers have invested time in creating 'classroom practice videos' to support inter-visitation cycles. Teachers stated that as part of the lesson study they video tape their lessons and reflect on the learning and that this practice provides a clear understanding of the expectations around teaching to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.
- Parents stated that the teachers are more than willing to work with them to help their children. For example, one parent shared that her child was having difficulty in class and the teacher went out of her way to consult with other teachers to obtain strategies to assist her child and shared them with her to implement at home. The parent stated she is now noticing a big difference with her child's engagement in class. Parents also mentioned that the school has established a student-mentoring program, "Matadors" where seventh and eighth grade students mentor sixth graders, and teach organization, communication, and other college and career readiness skills.
- The school engages families in understanding instructional expectations by focusing on the expectations and the work their children are doing in their courses. For example, the school has curriculum-themed evenings focused on: advisory curriculum, literacy /humanities, math, and science. The school offers six annual presentations of student artwork and performances, and "Open Fridays" where parents are invited into classrooms for a review of classwork. In addition, teachers provide workshops for families on curriculum, grading, and online resources, to help them support their children.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school uses common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned to the school's curricula; however, ongoing checks for understanding, student self-assessments, and actionable feedback to students, vary across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Teachers use assessment data to make effective adjustments to meet student needs, but all students are not aware of their next learning steps to maximize learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses *Jumprope*, an online grading system where teachers regularly upload students' formative and summative data and other relevant information including student profiles. Administrators and teachers to monitor student progress track this data regularly. In addition, students have access to review their performance across the year across all subject areas for every marking period.
- The school administers Common Core performance tasks in English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science, three times per year. This data is used to identify grade level strengths and weaknesses, to determine learning gaps in the curricula, and to make adjustments to meet learning needs.
- Checks for understanding were observed in most classrooms and teachers circulated and documented student learning. For example, in one class a teacher said "show me thumbs up if you know what you are going to do next?" In another class, the teacher asked, "How do you know? Turn-and-share with your partners" and then checked in to hear student responses.
- Most work in student's folders showed rubric-based performance level scores with some teacher comments, however, some student work in math showed only checkmarks. In addition, in a few student folders, there were collections of work that showed evidence of peer feedback and some evidence of teacher feedback to students to inform next steps. During the student meeting, students articulated they get feedback from their peers and that teachers give them feedback mostly in their published essays. Two students stated that they use their rubric as a checklist to see how they can make their essays better.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across grades and subjects, school leaders and teachers reflectively and strategically align instruction to the shifts of the Common Core Learning Standards and curricula emphasize higher order thinking skills.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions build instructional coherence across grades and content areas so that all students demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum units, lesson plans, and student work viewed, illustrate academic tasks that are linked to complex texts that immerse students in intellectually demanding learning activities. For example, in all subjects students are required to complete tasks such as evidence-based position papers that involve making a claim, analyzing, and supporting the claim, and presenting their work to teachers and peers. For example, one task required students to analyze how slavery affects slave owners and think about what people who defend slavery may think and use text evidence to justify their reasoning.
- Lessons and academic tasks strategically integrate the instructional shifts across subject areas. For example, an eighth grade English language arts task asked students to create a refute that addressed a counterclaim topic, identify a claim, and provide text-based details that support the claim and then participate in discussion in their debate groups about possible counterclaims and accurate refutes for their debate topics. A seventh grade social studies lesson on slavery required students to choose one of two topics explored, slaves or slave owners in stations, and complete a quick write activity to explain how Frederick Douglass' audience and purpose shaped how the story was told based on the text *Narrative of Life of Fredrick Douglass*. They had to use specific evidence from the text to support their claim.
- Math teachers vertically aligned the curriculum through the lens of student conceptual, developmental, and procedural knowledge, in each grade, especially in the areas of the number system and ratio and proportional relationships. Furthermore, all math units emphasize math practices. For example, a math lesson included the math practices, where students in stations had to model linear functions with graphs equations, tables, and situations, convert between them, solve systems of equations with graphs, and write equations from verbal descriptions. Another task asked students to use the four square strategy to complete a task to show understanding of the mathematical practice, Reason abstractly and qualitatively.
- Academic tasks provided access to support English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWD) to engage cognitively with the curriculum. For example, the science lesson plan provided a range of reflection questions, mild, medium, and spicy, for students to choose, based on their level of understanding of their experiment with the concepts of solutions and specific concentrations. A humanities lesson offered students a flow-chart that was completed as a reference and a model activity for note taking so that students have a model of the expectations.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula, and are informed by the Danielson's Framework for Teaching, so that instructional strategies evidence use of extensions that enrich discussions.

Impact

Curricula provide opportunities for all learners to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills and most students have the opportunity to participate in peer-to-peer discussions to deepen student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Within each subject area and across grade levels, lessons offered some opportunities through focus questions provided by teachers for students in flexible groupings to learn and practice newly learned concepts and skills with peers and individually,. For example, groups of students in a sixth grade math class collaborated with peers in other groups to simplify expression by combining like terms and applying the distributive property, then come up with a strategy for combining like terms and write a shared response to a problem on newsprint. Similarly, in a humanities class, pairs of students worked together to evaluate quotes for relevance and choose the best one to support a claim.
- During a humanities lesson, the teacher showed students a model and asked them to discuss "What makes this refute effective? Most students participated and responded in groups or to their partner. In four classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions. In one lesson students had to evaluate evidence in an article for their argumentative essay and students had the opportunity to discuss their positions with their peers. However, in a few classrooms visited, there were minimal opportunities for peer-to-peer discussions and supports available for students to articulate their learning to their partners.
- During a math lesson in an Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) class, all students had the opportunity to choose and rotate stations and expected to analyze and solve linear equations and pairs of simultaneous linear equations. All students completed at least two stations. The students were given the opportunity to engage in a discussion with their partners or within their groups. Some groups of students, including students with disabilities, struggled with the task, but had access to calculators, support from a facilitator in the group, additional strategies, and manipulatives or models, to support their learning.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teacher teams engage in structured professional collaborations that strengthen teacher instructional capacity. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers play an integral role in key instructional decisions.

Impact

Distributed leadership structures and professional collaborations promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning standards, resulting in improved teacher practice and increased student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- The use of protocols during teacher team meetings has strengthened teacher capacity as teachers continually refine and revise their curricula to ensure effective integration of the Common Core Learning Standards across grades and content areas. One specific protocol regularly used describes the standard; names the learning associated with that standard, and asks a teacher to identify how and why the learning activities she associated with the standard are or are not working. Teachers then collaboratively develop action plans to target standards needing additional attention. All meeting minutes are posted on google-docs and available for all teams to access.
- All teachers participate in at least three teams, department, grade level, and trio teams. Grade teams engage in structured inquiry using a “kid talk” protocol around student work looking at the data for the students as part of a child study and determine which strategies best support the learners. During a Trio team meeting, teachers were engaged using a lesson study protocol to provide feedback to a teacher on how refutes add on to a counter claim. Teachers shared that the lesson study practices they engage in provides them with the opportunity to plan together, tape and observe each other’s lessons in a non-evaluative setting. They explained that they use low inference notes to discuss what went well, surface effective strategies, and pose questions about the practices observed. One teacher stated, “These conversations make me think deeper about my practice” and all teachers at the meeting stated that it has strengthen their own practice and they have seen growth in their student work as a result.
- Teachers at the team meetings stated that they provide regular input into school level decision-making due to the principal’s commitment to engaging all staff members in decisions that affect learning across the school. Teachers shared that they are looking at issues around student engagement and ownership of their learning and have made strategic shifts in their practice that improve upon small group instruction, feedback, and differentiation. For example, teachers selected students to track over time and determine student growth in engagement as measured by student self-evaluations, peer feedback, and quality of student work produced. They already see an increase in student engagement.