



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

City Knoll Middle School

Middle School M933

**525 West 44th Street
Manhattan
NY 10036**

Principal: Victoria Armas

**Date of review: April 28, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Bonnie Laboy**

The School Context

City Knoll is a new Middle school with 79 students in grade 6. The school population comprises 22% Black, 48% Hispanic, 19% White, and 8% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 35.4% special education students. Boys account for 37% of the students enrolled and girls account for 63%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 is 94.9%.

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	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	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	Additional Findings	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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

**3.4 High
Expectations**

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

High expectations are consistently communicated to the entire school community including teachers, students and families. Student led parent conferences and progress reports keep families apprised of student achievement toward college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support high expectations across all constituencies establish a culture of mutual accountability in school-family partnerships that support students' achieving college and career ready skills and behaviors and among teachers for meeting school expectations on teaching and learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Regular communication with parents include report cards, progress reports, student led conferences, phone calls, emails and the use of Skedula/Pupil Path online grading management system to keep families abreast of student progress toward college and career readiness and the mastery of standards.
- Through grade team meetings, individual planning conferences and professional development opportunities, the school leader consistently sets forth the expectations of data driven planning, establishment of routines and procedures, and practices that align to the Danielson Framework for teaching. In addition, a staff handbook and the school's instructional handbook set expectations for teaching and learning.
- Parents report, "The school's core values of community, respect and responsibility, hold students accountable to their learning and behavior." Student led parent teacher conferences afford students the opportunity to evaluate their performance and set goals for improvement. Parents indicate the conferences provide a clear portrait of how much their child has learned and how they can support them.
- School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with families to support student progress toward those expectations. The parents expressed the schools two college tours for the sixth graders and their parents set high expectations for college and career.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Instructional practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the school's belief about how students learn best. However, strategic entry points into the curricula and high quality supports and extensions vary across subject areas.

Impact

In some classrooms, teaching strategies were not fully refined to ensure strategic multiple entry points embedded into academic tasks in order to add further value to work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In keeping with the school's belief of how students learn best, students engage in partner work, small group work and independent practice. Active participation in hands-on activities, cooperative grouping and opportunities to demonstrate learning are articulated beliefs about how student learn best. Classroom activities reflect a commitment of these beliefs.
- Some classrooms are successfully integrating strategies to engage students in high levels of discussion, such as in English language arts (ELA) where groups of students were asked to discuss multi-media text sources and artifacts. Some classrooms rely on teacher directed conversations that limit students' ability to engage in meaningful discussions.
- The use of visuals, instructional charts and manipulative materials to support English language learners and students with disabilities varied across classrooms. A variety of manipulatives were used in math class to support tiered math exercises; however, groups of students were asked to share a magnifying glass in science to study a small ecosystem limiting, thus hindering students ability to engage fully in the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The Principal and teachers have developed curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts and use student work to plan and refine tasks to support diverse learners.

Impact

The school's standards-based curricula offer a range of learning experiences that support student learning and curricula refinements ensure that a variety of learners have curricula access.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers approach curriculum design from a shared belief of how students learn best and focus on student needs. The school has developed a lesson plan template that aligns lessons to the Danielson Framework for teaching, student learning targets, the Common Core standards and the instructional shifts. For example, in ELA students worked on the learning target, "I can synthesize diverse text in order to make a claim."
- Lesson plans and academic tasks include the integration of the instructional shifts across subject areas. For example, in the ELA class, students discussed and explored artifacts, articles and online speeches to make claims regarding the risks of exploration.
- Instructional tasks and targeted instructional strategies are incorporated into differentiated math lesson plans. For example, the math class is organized using three-tiers of math activities ranging in complexity. Students in differentiated groups were provided with a range of manipulatives to determine how dimensions of rectangular prisms affect their volume.

Findings

Teachers use common assessments, rubrics and grading policies aligned to the school's curricula to gain a clear understanding of student progress towards goals.

Impact

Teachers make effective adjustments to curriculum at the teacher team and classroom level to provide feedback to ensure all students make progress towards meeting their goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Students maintain a portfolio of work to compare earlier writing to more current pieces. Students shared work products that included rubrics and teacher feedback requiring them to include text based evidence in their writing. Students explained that rubrics help them think about their writing and ways to improve their writing techniques.
- Teacher teams meet on a weekly basis to analyze assessment results and student work. During the visit, the team analyzed a piece of student writing using a rubric and the appropriate Common Core Learning Standards. The team highlighted what the student was doing well, what they needed to work on, and the appropriate teaching strategies needed for improvement. For example, the teachers noted the student's improved use of academic tone and discussed strategies for the student to add more details and quotes to her writing. In addition, they highlighted how the student's writing has grown over the course of the year.
- The school uses Performance Series common assessments which are administered three times a year. Assessments are analyzed to identify trends and implications for instruction. Such analysis led to the need to support students in the identification of claims and providing evidence to support the claims. Students were observed developing and practicing these skills during visits to classrooms.

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

Teachers engage in frequent structured collaborations to examine student work and make key decisions about curricula and teaching practices to support student learning.

Impact

The school's professional collaborations foster reflection, enhance the instructional capacity of teachers and contribute to consistent instructional strategies that focus on improving student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher team collaboration and conversations about student work result in changes to curricula, materials used and teaching practices. The teacher team observed used the Tuning Protocol to examine student writing samples to identify students' strengths and areas in need of improvement. Teachers created a graphic organizer to capture findings and next instructional steps to address student needs.
- A schedule of common planning time ensures teachers have time to meet and collaborate. Teachers gather in grade level teams to develop and analyze student work and data. They also give each other feedback on their lesson plans using the Tuning Protocol. One teacher indicated, "The work of teacher teams has helped me tweak my teaching practice by improving my questioning techniques and pacing of my lessons."
- Teacher teams' review of student work supports adjustments to lesson plans as evidenced by the math/science team further honing language for a tiered assignment in math that served as an example for the science teacher, resulting in the development of a tiered unit test in science.