



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School

Middle-High School Q167

**90-30 Metropolitan Avenue
Queens
New York 11375**

**Principal: Damon McCord
Co-Director: Patrick Finley**

**Date of review: February 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Mabel Muñiz- Sarduy**

The School Context

Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School is a middle/high school with 722 students from grades 6 through grade 11. The school population comprises 19% Black, 38% Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native 3%, 21% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 16% 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 96%.

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	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders effectively convey high expectations regarding teaching and learning through open dialogue and professional learning opportunities for all staff. The school effectively collaborates with families in relation to students' college and career readiness.

Impact

Transparent communication of high expectations to staff has led to joint responsibility of improving pedagogy and student learning across the school. The school's effective communication to families provides clear understanding of student progress towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- In an effort to communicate high expectations to the staff, staff received a handbook/core values practice outline which includes; standard alignment, flow of Learning Expeditions, characteristics of guiding questions, planning a case study, field work, service learning, perseverance and rigor, examining student work, curricula that supports global skills and creating a college bound culture. The school's core value practices were created by all content area teachers using the Common Core Learning Standards, aligned rubrics and the continuous review of student work. Teachers facilitate all professional learning and inquiry work, as shared during the teacher meetings and reviewing their professional learning plans. Teachers engage in inter-visitations, as a new teacher shared how it was helpful to get feedback from a colleague to improve and support her teaching practices.
- Families are provided with effective communication by teachers who provide bi-weekly review of topics of expeditions for parents via workshops, emails, and newsletters. A parent shared how helpful it is to know what her child is learning before, during and after school. At the end of an expedition, parents articulated that students get to present in each subject area the connection of each subject to the expedition learned.
- In partnership with the school, the Parent's Association created a parent handbook which describes how parents can communicate with staff regarding their child's achievement. This handbook provides tips for parents including the school "Jump Rope" website where parents and students can go to regularly check for updated class assignments and grades. Staff members train students on how to articulate to parents their next steps in all subject areas through student-led conversations. Parent workshops are facilitated by teachers to promote college and career readiness. For example, a parent expressed how the school is always encouraging students to think about careers for the future, in particular, she likes the career day which gives students an opportunity to dream and achieve their aspirations.
- The school's expeditionary professional development plan facilitated by teachers, has long term goals to build the internal capacity of every school staff, including supervisors. This plan builds mutual accountability for all content area staff which facilitates them owning their practice, since it is created collectively. Some examples of topics include; leadership coaching, analyzing data, curricular planning, classroom observations, coaching cycles and national activities. This plan is created by teachers and Expeditionary learning coaches before the start of the school year and is revised throughout the year, as they review data.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teacher pedagogy provides a coherent set of beliefs aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and Instructional shifts which is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Across classrooms, teachers provide scaffolds and multiple entry points to support student learning.

Impact

Teaching practices provide opportunities for students to engage in tasks that meet the demands of the Common Core Learning Standards including the instructional shifts. However, in some classrooms, strategic multiply entry points and high-quality scaffolds were not provided to allow all students to demonstrate higher-order thinking within their work products. .

Supporting Evidence

- In some classrooms, there was evidence of teachers clearly outlining and articulating the long term target for the lesson through the student- friendly, "I can" objective and reflection for the lesson. For example, in one classroom, the lesson's long term target was "I can analyze the impact of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand", and students were able to successfully articulate their understanding of the question and share their ideas with each other. However, strategic scaffolds and supports for the different learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, were not always included to support the different learning needs within the classroom. For instance, during a 10th grade Global History lesson, students worked in teams learning about the physical and psychological effects of World War I on the people and nation of Europe. Each group was provided with different texts to read and was responsible for independently text-coding information on the "note-catcher" organizer. However, not all students required this level of support to engage with the task, while others required additional scaffolds that would allow them to successfully complete the assignment.
- During a visit to another class, students read "Percy Jackson" and "The Hero's Journey", using the close reading strategy. Students were able to make connections and cite evidence from the two texts. Teachers provided scaffolds such as graphic organizers which supported struggling readers and allowed all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, to access the material in order to compare the two texts and demonstrate their understanding. Conversely, students in another class worked throughout the lesson discussing how to create a mechanism that demonstrates a transfer of energy and tested how electricity was created. Students were able to articulate and use a rubric to find multiple ways in which to get a plastic windmill to spin, however, everyone was using the same rubric and tools to come up with an answer to the task.
- In another class, students were challenged to begin a Robot Copy Cat Challenge by calculating rates and applying rates to real situations. Students were observed working on a robot sensor, dividing to see how much power was needed to calculate the rate and then programming the robot to follow a graph, however, the lesson lacked strategic multiply entry points based on the needs of different learners.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school strategically aligns curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards with a plan of action to integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions have resulted in coherence across grades and subject areas and the promotion of college and career readiness for all learners. Academic tasks provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses an inter-disciplinary expeditionary learning approach for teaching and learning. For the middle school, there are a set of guiding questions that are shared by all content areas. In planning expeditions, each content area has a least one case study where multiple content areas are engaged in the same case analysis. At the high school level, units of study range from twelve to sixteen weeks long, with connections to real world application. For example, in a learning expedition curriculum map students will explore and understand the concept of cause and effect, through the "The Next Earth" and Hurricane Sandy" respectively. These two case studies revealed the big idea of a "butterfly effect" by delving into past events, ranging from the origin of the universe, to a sudden change in atmospheric pressure, which both result in events that impact the present and possibly the future.
- The school has expeditionary core practices which include; curriculum, instruction, assessment, culture, character and leadership. For example, some of the curriculum practices include; standard alignment, skill and concept maps, scope and components of learning expeditions, guiding questions, building character through global understanding, College Bound curriculum and secondary structures to support college and career readiness. Lesson design and format include tasks that represent student thinking, using ongoing assessments, and teaching across the disciplines to support all learners by building curiosity and creating purpose. The culture and character practice provides clear school-wide expectations, fostering character, establishing structures for knowing students well, and engaging families and the community in the life of the school. Additionally, the leadership practice includes; cultivating a positive school culture, using data to drive instruction, aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment for student achievement and structured time to support the school's vision.
- The school's unit plan, "*The Butterfly Effect*" builds coherence across content, as literacy, science, social studies and math skills are all included. Teachers designed a lens through which students can understand the concepts of cause and effect, through the "*The Next Earth*" and "*Hurricane Sandy*". This unit included a math component, using geometry disciplines, such as perpendicular lines and theorems, as well as interior and exterior angles. All students, including ELLs and students with disabilities were responsible for creating a company name and circular logo using the geometric properties of a circle which they plan to promote in the future.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses teacher-created common assessments and rubrics to track student progress towards goals.

Impact

Feedback to students and teachers based on assessments and grading is used to enable the school to be more precise in measuring student progress, in order to adjust curricula and teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a goal for ELLs and students with disabilities to demonstrate more than one year of progress, as measured by the New York State assessments. In order to be transparent, the school uses an online grading system where teachers regularly upload student's formative and summative data and other relevant information like student assignments and due dates. This data is tracked regularly by administrators and teachers to monitor student progress. In addition, parents have access to review their children's performance and assignments across the year, across all subject areas and for every marking period including assignments. In review of data, the school determined the need in one area in math to apply the properties of operations to generate equivalent expressions and in ELA, determined by the on-line I-Ready assessments, that vocabulary in context was a need for particular students and other data revealed a need for grappling with complex text and content. Teachers indicated they have seen progress in these areas through evidence of work products.
- The school uses mock regents, I-Ready assessments, and pre and post assessments to determine next steps for teaching. After reviewing target assessment data from Algebra II/Trigonometry and mock regents results, teachers decided to revise their unit plans to include making predictions based on several graphs, identifying the difference between a linear and exponential function, solving rational equations, inequalities showing the constraints of how the stock market crashed, the difference between sine and cosine on a unit circle, writing a trigonometric function and, identifying the correct quadrant of any reference angle. These adjustments were made to address the gaps in student learning and to assist the school in achieving their school goals of increasing the number of students taking the regents exam.
- Actionable feedback, as well as next steps was provided on student work products. During the student meeting, a student was able to share that he reviews these comments to ensure he is on the correct path and so that he does not make similar errors in the future.

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

A vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations to analyze student work and data, with targeted focus on the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Distributive leadership structures are embedded throughout the school.

Impact:

Professional collaborations have led to school-wide instructional coherence and an increase of student learning across the school. Distributive leadership is embedded to provide ownership of key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers articulated the high-quality authentic real-life connections students make through the school’s learning expeditions. Teachers shared the common beliefs of combining students across grades to engage in learning expeditions and how the collaborative work between new and experienced teachers, help establish common goals, norm rubrics and expectations and embed different department content, so that everyone speaks the same language through the inter-connectedness across all subject areas.
- Teachers play an integral part in creating the expeditionary units of study which affect student learning across the school. After review of data, which is color-coded to determine whether students are on track towards graduation in all content areas, it is evident that teachers and administrations are keeping a precise look at how students are progressing and are developing the supports needed, to continue that progress.
- School-wide instructional coherence is evident throughout the middle school and high school through learning expeditions that include all content areas. The expeditions for grades 6-8 are Food, Glorious Food, Transforming Cities, Invaders, Neighborhood Watch; It’s Revolutionary, Price of Progress, Fight for Our Rights, and Origins and Impact. For grades 9-11 students have expeditions such as: “Times, They are a Changin’”, “Great Power, Great Responsibility”, “The Ground We Stand On, “Butterfly Effect”, Built to Last” and “The Road Less Traveled”.
- Distributed leadership structures are embedded through grade teams, department teams, instructional leadership teams and instructional coaches. During an observed 8th grade team meeting, a teacher articulated how helpful it was to review student work and revise the units with colleagues because it gave her many ideas. This collegial work helps teachers understand the work ahead and clarify misunderstandings in a safe environment.