



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

William H. Carr

Middle School Q194

**154-60 17th Avenue
Queens
NY 11357**

Principal: Jennifer Miller

**Date of review: May 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart**

The School Context

William H. Carr is a middle school with 1,079 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 2% Black, 31% Hispanic, 34% White, and 33% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.4%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Teachers collaborate in a wide variety of professional learning and inquiry teams to examine student work and assessment data within grades and across departments. Teams of teachers incorporate the instructional shifts into curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.

Impact

Collaborative teacher work has resulted in improved teacher practices and student achievement and continuously supports progress toward meeting identified goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly in grade level teams by department. They plan their meetings in advance, including the agenda and the role each will play in the next meeting. Teachers indicated that they take advantage of additional common planning times to meet more informally to continue their planning. They work on defining rigor and engagement and look at student work and data to explore how they can improve both their practice and student achievement. One teacher team discussed the writing protocol they developed to have students restate, answer, provide two “for examples,” and tie together (RAFFT). They noticed that students were improving their writing with this structure, but also noticed that students seemed to be writing mechanically and had lost some of their unique voice. They also found that introductions were not as interesting in on-demand writing tasks as they were in extended writing assignments. They discussed strategies for students to learn to hook the reader in the introduction.
- The school wide instructional team meets every other week. This vertical team is composed of teachers from different grades and content areas. The school wide team developed a protocol for students to highlight different types of information in a text using one color to indicate a fact and another color to indicate an opinion. Student work samples showed that students use this strategy.
- The school learned about a discussion protocol through their partner school in the Learning Partners Program. With their partner school, they videotaped teachers conducting classes using this protocol and then trained teachers back at their school. The use of this protocol is now part of the instructional focus for the year and students were heard making claims and counterclaims, agreeing and disagreeing, and pushing the thinking of their peers.
- Teachers have ownership of their own professional development. They join book clubs, which meet regularly and include topics such as higher-order questioning or increasing student engagement. Most teachers participate in multiple teams and professional development programs. One teacher is a member of a grade 8 content team, the curriculum team, the Learning Partners Program team, the school-wide inquiry team, the Teacher Leadership Program, and the Measures of Student Learning team. The teachers have created their own in-house “Learning Partners Program” to conduct intervisitations.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Most teaching practices reflect a belief system that students learn best in a student-centered environment that provides opportunities for all learners to be engaged in rigorous tasks.

Impact

Student work products demonstrate higher order thinking and reflect the instructional shifts. However, some teaching strategies are not implemented school wide on a regular basis.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus has been to shift from teacher-centered instruction to students leading the discussion. The school is using a discussion protocol referenced by posters in all classrooms showing the hand signals that students should use to join in the discussion. Students created a new signal of scissors to indicate they want to "cut in" on the speaker to add something important. After speaking, a student calls on another student to continue the discussion. However, there were multiple missed opportunities for teachers to utilize this protocol in some classes. In one class, the students were beginning to engage in a discussion using the protocol signals, but the teacher kept control and called on students to "add on" or "explain further", limiting students' opportunities to facilitate the discussion.
- The principal and school share a strong belief that students learn best when they have ownership of their learning in a student-centered, teacher monitored environment, when they engage in questioning and discussion of rigorous, high-level topics, and when they understand clearly what is expected of them. Thus, students keep reading logs to track the improvement in their reading and to record their ideas, thoughts, and opinions. During several lessons students rotated through workstations with text, photo, manipulatives, or video resources in order to access the materials at their own pace and in the manner best suited to their learning styles. Students stated that they understand they are expected to work hard and that the work might not be easy. One student expressed the opinion that her assignments were challenging and pushed her to work harder.
- There is a school-wide focus on academic vocabulary. English language learner students were using content area glossaries and online translation programs during their work periods. Students in a self-contained class were studying the ways in which rock weathers and focused on words such as, igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary. Furthermore, classrooms have word walls, but they are not always current with the school-wide calendar of vocabulary words.
- Students produce high levels of work and discussion across all content areas, including the arts. Groups of students in a dance class were choreographing a dance sequence. As a whole group activity, the teacher had the students analyze the quality of their choreography using a rubric that outlined each of the characteristics that were required. Additionally, groups of students were observed filming documentaries, they wrote in their film class, and the halls are filled with students' creative artwork showing adherence to the arts curricula.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and teachers align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts into rigorous curricula and tasks.

Impact

Instructional plans reflect coherence across content areas, and promote college and career readiness by emphasizing high-order skills.

Supporting Evidence

- In addition to the curricula of EngageNY, and CMP3, and Expeditionary Learning, the school uses Achieve 3000 for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELL). Additionally, MyON, an interactive digital library, supports students in keeping track of their reading levels and provides access to books online. Teachers use MATHia from Carnegie Learning to enhance math instruction. The curricula reflect purposeful decisions made by school leaders and teachers to promote skills that prepare students for high school and beyond. In particular, the school has adopted a discussion protocol around which teachers create lesson plans, enhancing coherence of curriculum across all content areas.
- Teachers use resources from EngageNY as models for grade-level units of study and assessments that focus on writing based on evidence, citing from multiple sources, and building academic vocabulary. Teacher teams engage in an ongoing process to revise curriculum maps with specific references to providing additional resources for ELL students. They are already making suggestions for revisions for school year 2015-16, such as using an online program to manage reading and writing conference notes.
- The principal reviews lesson plans as part of the observation process with particular attention to teachers who have improvement plans. Most lesson plans include accommodations for groups of students, such as having glossaries and laptops available for ELLs to access Google translator.
- The school offers opportunities for students in the honors classes to prepare for the Living Environment Regents exam as well as the Spanish Language Proficiency exam. Students in the advanced math class, as well as those in the honors classes, take the Common Core Algebra I Regents exam.
- The school offers a wide variety of fine and performing arts. Students can choose instrumental music, drama, dance, fine art, film, media, and photography. All sixth grade students take a course in public speaking, which school leaders and teachers changed from grade 8 because they determined it was needed for students to maximize their participation in class discussions.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies, aligned to the school's instructional focus and consistently utilize ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment practices.

Impact

Students receive ongoing feedback about their progress and understand what they need to do to improve, and teachers adjust their lessons to meet the assessed needs of their students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school wide grading policy specifies that 50% of a student's grade must be determined by the post-assessment and culminating tasks of a unit, while classwork, participation, and notebooks account for 10%. Teachers input scores on the pre-, mid-, and post-assessments into the Data Driven Classroom (DDC) portal on Skedula, and as the grading policy is programmed into Skedula, marking period grades are uniformly calculated. Furthermore, some teachers record daily class participation so that students understand the importance of student discussion in the class. Students indicated they check their progress regularly and are able to determine how well they are performing in each class.
- Teachers create assessments and rubrics that are reviewed by the assistant principals to ensure alignment with the Common Core and the school's curricula. Students across the sixth grade are assessed and grouped into three groups, relative to their learning needs in the areas of citing text evidence, identifying theme, and developing vocabulary. Teachers across the grade create activities and tasks to address the needs of these groups.
- Some teachers use exit slips to assess student learning during the lesson. One teacher had students write a summary of their next steps and pin it to the "tweet board" as they left the room. In a social studies lesson, students completed exit slips that asked them to explain how preparing for a debate had helped them to meet their social studies goals.
- Several teachers were observed keeping records of how students were performing on their assigned tasks. One teacher recorded which students were making connections to previous work and which were explaining their thinking to other students in the group in order to determine groups for future instruction. The results of these ongoing checks for understanding are often posted in Pupilpath to inform other teachers on the grade of the progress students are making.
- One student indicated that initially she was not comfortable sharing her work with a friend for peer evaluation until she realized that a fellow student would give her feedback that was "real." Now she thinks the peer evaluations help her improve her writing.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations for student achievement and college and career readiness to students and their families. School leaders also clearly outline the expectations for high levels of professionalism and instruction.

Impact

Teachers are held accountable by school leaders for meeting high levels of expectations and families are aware of their children's progress.

Supporting Evidence

- The School Leadership Team (SLT) works closely with the school leaders to develop and monitor the Comprehensive Educational Plan goals to ensure they are informed by the Chancellor's Four Pillars and guide the communication of expectations for professionalism and student achievement. At monthly meetings, the SLT reviews progress toward meeting these expectations.
- Observation reports include feedback to teachers on how they are meeting or exceeding expectations regarding instructional practices. For example, one report commends a teacher for actively engaging and supporting colleagues in professional conversations about improving practice. Another referenced a school-wide goal of increasing student discussion and noted that the teacher's students were responding at length and sharing their thinking. This same observation noted that the teacher needed to work on sustaining deep conversations while noting factual inaccuracies that surface in students' comments.
- The principal relies on Pupilpath and email to provide opportunities for continuous communication with parents. Pupilpath has automated translation into Spanish and Mandarin, in alignment with the school's population. More than 60% of parents are registered to use this program to find out about homework assignments, check attendance, and see how their children are doing on classwork. Parents also use this program to communicate with teachers.
- Guidance counselors and assistant principals hold individual meetings with all eighth grade students to discuss their progress reports and high school options.
- Teachers, parents, and students spoke about how well the school teaches skills needed for college and career, such as study skills, perseverance, organization, time management, self-assessment, and self-monitoring of behavior.