

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School

Intermediate School Q250

**158-40 76 ROAD
QUEENS
NY, 11366**

Principal: Tara Mrwik

**Dates of review: February 2, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Danielle DiMango**

The School Context

I.S. 250 The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School is a Middle school with 329 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 28% Black, 30% Hispanic, and 14. % White and 26% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.90%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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.	Celebration	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	Developing
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.	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school has maintained strategic systems of checking and rechecking curriculum and tasks to ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts within and across grades. Planning centers around school-wide data and student artifacts to ensure modifications and decisions, are coherent, connected and effectively serve the needs of all learners.

Impact

Teachers collaborative work around unpacking the Common Core Learning Standards has resulted in them gaining a clear understanding of what students need to know within and across grades in order to make long term changes to student outcomes. As a result, both school-wide and at the classroom level, students have exposure to strategically designed curricula and tasks aligned to key standards in all content areas that are filling gaps in student learning and deepening their thinking leading to improvements in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Within a multi-year curriculum change vision, teachers across content areas are using the backward design planning method to develop clear learning objectives with aligned and guiding questions within all units of study that students use to reference their progress. For example, teachers redesigned a math unit to include essential and guiding questions based on understanding proportional relationships with infused real world problems.
- The school follows the New York City science scope and sequence with a focus on informational and argumentative writing within units and tasks. One task noted was a scaffolded task where students had to analyze content and process of making recycled paper and its impact on the environment, engage in mathematical reasoning and argue if the price of recycled products and their quality is cost effective.
- All units of study and tasks have built in scaffolds such graphic organizers, supports to deconstruct prompts, hint boxes, academic language prompts, testable question guides, as well as visual aids and media to support struggling and second language learners, as they engage in on grade level tasks.
- All units of study have pre, midline and post assessments that teachers analyze along the way to plan and refine maps in order to ensure students have access to content and that decisions around modifications are closing achievement gaps. For example, using pre-assessment data, social studies teachers in addressing student gaps in literacy standards, redesigned a unit of study on culture around an essential question using "*I Can*" statements, such as, "I can select evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection and research".

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Although some classrooms demonstrated teaching practices and strategies aligned to the curriculum with scaffolded learning activities to provide rigor and challenge for all learners, in other classrooms, teachers struggled with effective planning and implementation of curriculum and tasks.

Impact

As a result of varied teaching practices; some students do not demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation in their learning or have an accurate understanding of content as demonstrated in their work products and group discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus centers around the effective use of data to plan for instruction with a focus on assessment of learning to meet the needs of all students. Although there is evidence of data collection during lessons in the form of questioning, exit slips and KWL charts, not all teachers are using this data to design and implement effective practices that will address the standards in a way that students understand and will allow them to work independently or with their peers. For example, in one science lesson observed, although the teacher used multiple modalities such as video, text and a large ball to demonstrate thermal energy, these strategies were not aligned to the particular needs of students and therefore did not translate into deeper understanding of content.
- Although there are clear scaffolds within units of study for access and enrichment, such as translated writing prompts and graphic organizers and enrichment activities built into lessons, there were limited times within classrooms observed that allowed students to fully engage in activities, where these tools could support autonomy and ownership. For example, in one literacy class observed that contained a large number of English language learners, these students were not able to use supports provided due to the complexity of text selection and task design, which led to the teacher asking and answering his own questions during the share out at the end of the lesson.
- In many classrooms observed, teacher planned tasks and "asks" of the students during group time, were not aligned to the lesson objective and were confusing to students. For example, in one classroom students were asked to engage with their peers in a close reading activity, and analyze different elements of characterization, setting and plot. However, teacher questioning did not support students in being able to complete the task without teacher intervention.
- Throughout classroom visits there was a misalignment between teacher planning and implementation of lessons. For example, one math plan reviewed included a focus question; warm up, high leverage questions, an opening meeting with connections to real world math, an activity that included modeling and a summary. The plan also included the teacher's explanation of each activity, grouping and assessment. However, while observing the lesson, teaching practices and planned questions were not implemented, which led to questioning pathways that required one word responses from students, which did not allow them to explain their thinking and resulted in student reliance on the teacher during independent tasks.
- During the student group meeting, many students shared pacing concerns within units of study. For example, one student stated he had been working from the same text and the same piece of informational writing since September of this year.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school has effectively aligned assessments to accurately measure student progress and teachers consistently analyze these tools and use data to make adjustments to curriculum. Standards-based rubrics and student self-assessment tools are used in conjunction with units of study to allow for consistent feedback and self-assessment practices.

Impact

Aligned assessment tools and rubrics allow both teachers and students to track gaps over time and provide a clear portrait of student performance and progress. Students are able to use these tools effectively to determine next steps leading to improvements in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher engagement in curricular alignment included the development of pre, mid-line and post assessments, as well as aligned rubrics that focus on key standards that scaffold within and across grade levels. Teachers consistently use these assessments to make modifications to rubrics that focus on gaps found within units based on mid- line assessments. For example, teachers across grades evaluated pre and benchmark assessments and determined common mistakes around students being able to synthesize their ideas. Adjustments were made to the unit of study to include student-friendly definitions, lessons that addressed differences between main idea and theme, as well as the inclusion of graphic organizers.
- Aligned to the curricular work was the development of student self and peer assessment tools that allow students to measure their work and that of their peers against specific standards. In reviewing student work there was evidence of attached rubrics aligned to content, along with peer feedback and collaboration rubrics. Students had an awareness of their next steps. For example, “I was missing specific text-based evidence to support my claim”; students were also able to speak to the peer and self- assessment rubrics included with their work, which asked them to write standard-aligned statements regarding what they did well and what they needed to work on in order to meet or exceed a particular writing or content standard.
- Feedback from teachers observed within classrooms, on bulletin boards and during the student meeting, was aligned to student learning expectations and of the rubrics used in all content areas. For example, feedback such as “excellent portrait of persistence as displayed by the character, but why put all that he goes through in one example, use other instances from the text” was aligned and relevant to the expository/explanatory writing rubric the students were working from and allowed the student to speak to his next steps and how he made adjustments and improvements to his work product.

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

Findings

Teacher teams engage in consistent and systematic professional collaborations that promote the instructional improvement vision of the school and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. This work includes school-wide structures for evaluating assessment data and student work products.

Impact

Teachers have developed a collaborative culture and have built high levels of trust strengthening teacher ability to align their practice to the rigor of the standards and improving teacher decision making capacity to best meet student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- As English Language Arts (ELA) data within and across grades demonstrated gaps in student understanding of theme in literature, the literacy team engaged in inquiry where they developed scaffolded questions that were administered to all students in grades six through eight. As a result of their data analysis, , teachers developed common planning books where they now share effective tools and scaffolds that support students and fill learning gaps within units.
- During an observed math team meeting, teachers analyzed post- assessment data to determine if strategies implemented throughout the unit of study, brought students to a deeper understanding of ratios. Some strategies implemented were use of fraction strips, number lines, rate tables and classroom charts. Teachers concluded that although these were good tools to implement in the classroom, they did not necessarily improve student outcomes which led to a redefining of their focus to close this achievement gap.
- Teachers consistently engage in practices where they review and revise curricula units of study based on what they learn from data. This was evident in the math team where teachers discussed how they have been blending math curricula using a variety of sources that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards because the data revealed that the base program being utilized by the school was not going deep enough in the standards that students demonstrated weaknesses.
- While teacher teams are teacher led and there is consistent analysis of data and student work products, teachers are not receiving sufficient ongoing support to fully promote school-wide instructional coherence. For example, in both the math and ELA meetings observed, it was evident that teachers had analyzed state and pre and post assessment data to determine gaps in student learning and engaged in inquiry around how to incorporate effective practices to improve students understanding of theme and fractions. However, student work samples still revealed gaps in both content areas and teachers did not have outlets of support to move this inquiry forward to achieve progress in goals they set for their students.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Through consistent communication to staff based on a detailed needs assessment and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*; school leaders have established a culture for learning and professionalism with aligned accountability systems. These communication streams around high expectations have transferred to students and their families and support student progress.

Impact

Teachers have a clear understanding of high expectations reflective in their planning and the work of teacher teams and have established an environment of accountability around building capacity within school culture and the instructional core. Additionally, ongoing communication and feedback is leading parents and students toward an understanding of the necessary pathways towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents state that teachers are available to them weekly and offer suggestions on how they can connect with the curriculum and help their children at home. Some examples include creating individual flashcards, connecting content to individual talents, using websites such as Teen Biz to track reading progress and engage in close reading discussions at home.
- In analyzing a variety of data streams such as state ELA, math and science scores, as well as Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) data, student work products and discussions with teachers, the principal has communicated a clear vision and focus around using data to drive decision-making around curriculum, instruction and supporting individual needs of students. The principal engages staff in professional learning opportunities and provides feedback with a focus on the following elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*: assessment criteria, monitoring student learning, feedback to students, student self-assessment, and monitoring of progress.
- During the student group meeting, students communicated that their teachers consistently articulate high expectations. All student work observed had aligned rubrics and relevant feedback from teachers that students were able to articulate how they used to improve work products. Students also stated they valued the ways teachers organize their group work and shared, “we are put in groups based on what we need and we get help in order to improve our work”.
- The school utilizes a variety of communication streams, such as “News and Notes”, student agenda books, progress reports, teacher websites, lexile reading levels through Teen Biz and extended parent teacher conferences for at- risk students.