

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Queens United Middle School

Middle School 289

**229-02 137th Avenue
Queens
NY 11423**

Principal: Richard Roder

**Date of review: April 17, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Lenon Murray**

The School Context

Middle school 289 is a middle school with 150 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 85% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1% White, and 8% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.2%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

The school uses common assessments, rubrics and grading policies across the vast majority of classrooms that are aligned to curricula and provide actionable feedback to students and teachers. The common assessments provide transparent picture of student progress, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Impact

The school's systems to monitor progress through data analysis are used continuously to provide feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. The curricula and instructional adjustments have led to student improvement across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The entire school uses grade-appropriate rubrics for all writing and performance tasks. These rubrics are refined on teacher teams and explained to students to assess their own work. There is even an explicit rubric for questioning and discussion techniques. Students are able to explain their current level of performance in writing, speaking, presenting and other rigorous tasks along with their next steps for improvement.
- The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress. The teachers use the Common Core Learning Standards to create pre and post assessments to measure growth over the six weeks cycle of a unit. After the pre-assessment is administered, the teachers adjust units and individual lessons as needed to meet students' needs. For example, in seventh grade writing the teacher adjusted the text-based question to create clarity for students. The school administers the Degrees of Reading Power early in the school year and every two months thereafter.
- English language learners are assessed at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels of their language mastery. Students with disabilities are continuously assessed against their Individualized Education Plan. Struggling students are also tracked through web-based programs like Achieve 3000 and I-Ready. Students are exposed to a longer school day through the Middle School Quality Initiative. School-wide quartile growth was up twenty-nine percent. School-wide raw score growth was up thirty-nine percent. Scholars at-risk or below grade level who moved up to grade level were up by thirteen percent. Sixth grade guided reading quartile growth was up by thirty-four percent.
- The school uses Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) assessments as a baseline in the fall. They then conduct formative assessments of essential learning skills such as problem formulation, communication and research. All students are exposed to after-school and Saturday programs to prepare students who are below grade level for promotion to the next grade. Performance in these programs are monitored through quizzes, writing-on-demand and performance tasks requiring research and presentation. This data is used to modify unit planning to meet students' needs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

While teaching practices provide consistent instructional supports, including questioning and discussion techniques, the utilization of strategic entry points and extensions that foster profound reasoning in student work products varies across the school.

Impact

Across classrooms students are engaged in challenging tasks that produce meaningful work-products, yet there are missed opportunities for all learners, to take ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In all classrooms visited, teachers used a workshop model of teaching in which a mini-lesson is followed by teacher demonstrations and modeling. Students are then required to work individually or in groups responding to essential questions. In a seventh grade special education class the teacher demonstrated the tracking and charting of data in response to a survey. Students responded directly to teachers' questions; however they did not build on each other's responses. Conversations were not sustained without the teacher queries.
- The English as a second language teacher and the resource room teacher push in the classrooms at certain intervals during the school day to provide additional support to students with disabilities and English language learners. They align their instruction to the school's goals of problem formulation, communication and research. The school makes use of learning targets and performance tasks. Students are required to use academic vocabulary in writing and speaking throughout each lesson. Some examples of strategies used include tiered word walls, fluency in reading and mental math, multiple methods to solve word problem and evidenced-based shared writing.
- A review of student portfolios indicated consistent work in argumentative writing, writing to inform and writing to explain. The work products reflected high levels of student thinking and participation. For example, in a science class students wrote their individual papers on the circulatory system after having researched and discussed the topic in their groups.
- During a social studies lesson in a grade six integrated co-teaching class students responded to questions on the Industrial Revolution that were generated on the SMART board. Ideas were incubated in turning and talking to their partners while the teachers facilitated from the front of the room. The whole group discussion generated fewer student questions than the small group interaction.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards. Higher-order skills are consistently emphasized for all students across all grades.

Impact

The school's decisions about curricula build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities. Academic tasks push student thinking across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- Reading, writing, math and content area units of study are modified by teacher teams to integrate the Common Core instructional shifts. Some examples of planned strategies include tiered academic vocabulary, fluency in literacy and numeracy, multiple methods of solving word problems, text-based writing, and project-based learning.
- Curriculum maps provide evidence that the school develops its rigorous academic tasks through the resources available from Engage NY, the Department of Education Common Core library and the New York City science and social studies scope and sequence.
- Lesson plans from the classrooms visited emphasize learning targets, essential questions, prompts for discussion, vocabulary and grouping. Entry point strategies provided a range of possibilities to support students in completing rigorous academic tasks. For example, the use of transitional phrases, student friendly discussion prompts and cause and effect cues were visible in seventh grade English language arts and social studies lesson and unit plans.
- Unit plans across the content areas evidenced many different designs of academic tasks, numerous scaffolds and entry points for all students. Teachers tutor students in college and career readiness skills such as note-taking, debate and discussion techniques, project based learning and research skills. Strategies for supporting struggling students include sentence starters, graphic organizers, discussion prompts, video-clips, audio books and visual cues.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations consistently to staff through the Danielson Framework for Teaching, in trainings, and via different modes of communication. Workshops, meetings and performance updates keep families apprised of student progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations build collaboration, cooperation and accountability among staff, students and their families. This provides a clear path towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders conduct frequent formal and informal classroom observations and provide tailored feedback to teachers using the Danielson Framework. Classroom intervisitations, professional development and one to one conversations hold staff accountable for meeting expectations.
- Monthly parent newsletters, regular parent workshops and massive outreach to parents promote clear communication to families on the school's expectations and a defined path to college and career readiness. Parents requested and received the school's purchase of Study Island and its use of Engrade. The principal has an open door policy and parents receive immediate responses to their email queries and concerns.
- The school has a trained Positive Behavior Intervention Team (PBIS) that collaborates with parents to promote the social-emotional well-being of each child. Academic and behavioral expectations are outlined in regular assemblies and advisories with the guidance counselor. The leaders and faculty communicate the three core pillars to students which are critical thinking, civic responsibility and college and career readiness.
- Parents openly share their satisfaction with the school's lofty expectations and emphasis on college and career readiness which culminate in both a career day and a college day. The school has ongoing partnerships with several colleges including Long Island University, St. John's University and Syracuse University.

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

Teachers consistently analyze data and student work within inquiry-based teams. The leadership structures provide a method for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and instructional practices.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved pedagogy and student progress on assessments. The shared leadership structures build the school's capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams review the results of data from state exams, MOSL, formative assessments, unit assessments and the DRPs. They share ideas to adjust teaching practices and support increased student engagement based on data and student performance tasks. For example, the seventh grade special education teacher is working on using writing to drive literacy skills. Students receive explicit instruction on methods of answering text-based questions using proper literary conventions.
- Teacher teams meet formally twice a week and informally up to five times a week on their common prep and lunch periods. English as a second language and special education teachers are integrated into the departmental vertical teams. The departmental teams participate in six week inquiry data cycles. These include intervisitations to classrooms and face to face feedback sessions.
- Teacher leaders, who represent each subject area department, meet weekly with the principal to discuss professional development and teacher practices. They review school data to create solutions and address gaps in student performance. For example, seventh grade guided reading quartile growth is forty-five percent. Seventh grade non-guided reading quartile growth is twenty-nine percent. School initiatives have their genesis in these meetings. The school developed a discussion protocol and rubric to enhance questioning and discussion techniques. The professional development for the school year has been created and sustained by teacher leaders who also act as facilitators. Topics include the school's core values, the house structure, and the framework for great schools.
- Teachers explained on their teams that they were empowered to have substantial input on decisions including the review and selection of curricula resources, the placement, grouping and discipline of students, and the recruitment, interviewing and selection of new teachers.