



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Redwood Middle School**

**Middle School Q332**

**133-25 Guy R. Brewer Boulevard  
Queens  
NY 11434**

**Principal: Lisa Reiter**

**Date of review: May 7, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Shirley Wheeler-Massey**

## The School Context

Redwood Middle School is a middle school with 90 students in grade 6. The school population comprises 79% Black, 10% Hispanic, 0% White, 8% Asian and 3% Multi-Racial students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 is not available due to new school status.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Teacher leaders facilitate inquiry-based professional collaborations to support the analysis of student work, curricula and the sharing of best practices. Teachers are given opportunities to participate in school decisions regarding curricula.

### Impact

The work of teacher teams has led to the strengthening of pedagogical practices and opportunities for teachers to make critical curricula decisions to better support the needs of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has structured opportunities for teachers to collaborate during common planning periods and on Monday afternoons. During these allotted times they engage in lesson studies to provide each other feedback on lesson plans, analyze student work, assessment data and develop strategies to meet the needs of their learners. Currently, department meetings occur between the humanities and math teachers two days per week, weekly for the science team and monthly with the special education team. As a new school, with a majority of new teachers, team meetings are led by both the assistant principal and teacher leaders, who support the team's work around analyzing lessons plans and student data.
- During team meetings, teachers utilize the "*Looking at Student Work*" protocol to analyze student writing, writing and math performance tasks and other school assessment data, such as the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP). Additionally, prior to teaching a lesson, teachers bring their lesson plans to review with their peers, make adjustments based on the team's feedback which is followed by an analysis of student work from those lessons at subsequent meetings. Teachers analyze students' work to monitor the impact of the lesson structure, as well as instructional strategies and scaffolds included within the lesson. Other teachers on the grade make revisions to their lessons based on the successes or struggles of the presenting teacher in order to address the learning gaps that surface amongst students.
- At the math and humanities grade meeting, the team leader facilitated the teachers' analysis of students' math performance tasks to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to discuss strategies and scaffolds to help close the learning gaps emerging from their analysis. As teachers reviewed various students' work, they completed a "Student Work Analysis Template" used to track data and modify lesson plans. New teachers expressed that having the opportunity to flesh out their lessons prior to implementing them has supported their efforts and needs as new pedagogues. Teachers shared that as a result of making revisions based on data analysis, 68% of students showed progress of at least one reading level on their recent DRP assessments.
- Teacher leaders are identified to support the work of the administrative team by acting as mentors to new teachers, facilitating grade and department inquiry meetings and to engage in the decision-making process. For example, through the analysis of DRP and baseline math assessment data teachers realized that students had significant gaps in learning and felt the need to shift reading and math programs to better support them.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Teaching practices are beginning to reflect a common belief about student learning and become aligned to the curricula and the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Discussions and work products do not reflect high levels of student thinking.

### Impact

Inconsistent teaching practices have resulted in uneven exposure to the instructional shifts and opportunities for students to participate in discussions that reflect high levels of thinking in their learning and work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- As a new school, school leaders determined that they wanted to create a learning environment that is responsive to students' learning needs and decided to focus on student-to-student discussions and on-going assessment of student learning in order to support their beliefs of supporting and meeting students where they are. As a result, teachers engage in on-going professional learning aligned to this focus with support from the administration. Specific discussion prompts, such as the Partner A/B and Silent Discussion protocols are provided to the staff. However, the school's belief system and instructional foci were inconsistently observed across classrooms visited. For example, during one 6<sup>th</sup> grade humanities lesson, students were engaged in discussions around the poems they had written and were giving each other feedback on the poetic devices included in their work. However, in another humanities class, students were observed reading independently on their iPads for fifteen minutes without any reading skill-based focus. They were simply expected to set their own goals related to stamina and how they planned to increase their reading time. Students' were not provided opportunities to share their reading or ideas from the text with a partner, nor was time allotted to discuss within the whole group setting.
- In some of the classes visited, students were exposed to the instructional shifts such as citing textual evidence to support their responses and solving multi-step problems. However, some teachers still work on aligning their practices to the expectations of Common Core Learning Standards. For instance, during a 6<sup>th</sup> grade science lesson, students were provided opportunities to work in small groups using the silent discussion protocol to respond to questions on chart paper and cite evidence from a science article to support their responses. Yet, during a poetry lesson, while students were expected to provide text-based answers and use academic vocabulary, only a few students were observed using the poetic devices and language during class discussions. They were not referencing any literature that required them to cite evidence and simply used the poems as a reference tool for their writing.
- While students across the 6<sup>th</sup> grade are exposed to the same math content and are working through similar math problems that require them to make real-world connections; the approach to push students' critical thinking skills varies. For example, during one math lesson, the students were provided opportunities to engage in productive struggle to analyze conditions that produce congruent and non-congruent triangles and discuss their strategies with their peers. However, in another math class, the lesson was teacher-directed with students passively responding to the teacher's questions with little opportunity to share their solutions and strategies with their classmates.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The school effectively aligns its curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and ensures the incorporation of the instructional shifts. Teachers utilize student work and data to plan and refine curricula and academic tasks.

### Impact

Curricular decisions allow for coherence across the grade with a focus on college and career readiness skills. The planning and refinement of units and academic tasks based on students' specific needs provide access to learning opportunities in which they are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- Prior to opening its doors to students, school leaders and staff met to develop unit plans and their accompanying assessments aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards as well as the school-wide lesson plan template. At the beginning of the school year, teachers utilized Expeditionary Learning to support English language arts (ELA) instruction, Connected Math Project 3(CMP3) for math and the New York scope and sequence for social studies and science. During late fall, teachers analyzed the results of Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) and benchmark math assessment data and determined that their students needed more support with math basics and fluency. As a result, the school decided to shift from using CMP3 to utilizing Engage NY as a resource for math, as well as using a blended approach for ELA by incorporating elements from Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, and Expeditionary Learning. The school also decided to implement Light Sail, an online reading resource, one period daily for struggling students.
- Across the school, teachers are utilizing the school-wide lesson plan template that calls for the alignment of lessons to specific Common Core Learning Standards, the instructional shifts to be addressed, the planning of high-level questions, along with some scaffolds and extensions to meet the needs of their diverse learners. All unit plans reviewed provide unit overviews, essential questions, Common Core standards to be addressed, with the inclusion of assessments or tasks that provide scaffolds and extensions that allow students to engage in tasks at their levels. For example, a 6<sup>th</sup> grade poetry unit included a summative assessment/tasks that planned to provide supports such as mentor texts, sentence and stanza starters, along with extension opportunities for students to create their own poetry books.
- During common planning periods, teachers work collaboratively to ensure students are exposed to the instructional shifts across content areas, such as citing evidence to support a claim, making real-world connections to content, multi-step problem solving in math, and working on students fluency in both reading and math. For example, in a science unit, students are expected to cite specific textual evidence to support the analysis of science and technical texts and identify and use science terms within their written responses. Furthermore, one of the grades' reading and writing units called for students to engage in writing persuasive and argumentative essays requiring them to make a claim and demonstrate a logical argument by citing textual evidence from multiple sources.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Teachers are creating and utilizing assessments aligned to the curricula; however, rubrics are not fully aligned to the school's grading policy. Teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessments.

### Impact

The use of varied assessment practices have led to some teachers and students receiving limited feedback regarding student learning outcomes, thus hampering effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of the year, the school administered baseline assessments which include DRPs which are administered three times per year to track students' reading levels, Teachers College running records for struggling readers, performance based assessments to monitor students' writing and math skills, as well as Ready NY math assessments. Additionally, teachers created end of unit assessments. Data from these have guided some of the school's curricula decisions and adjustments for English language arts and math. For each performance assessment or task, students are provided with rubrics that inform them of the expectation of the assignment. However, the feedback and ratings for those tasks do not always match the school's grading policy. For example, in one classroom, students were provided with a check plus or minus on their work, while in review of students' work folders, some students received scores of 2.8 or 3.5 on tasks, which few were able to clearly articulate the grading scale, the half-points within the grading policy or the purpose of the partial ratings on their assignments.
- While most student work on bulletin boards and in student work folders contained feedback from teachers; the depth of the feedback varied across classrooms. Some work had little information that provided students with their next steps for learning. For example, in one classroom, feedback on a students' poem stated "excellent use of rhyme and rhythm; your knack for imagery is impressive as I can envision you playing one-on-one; next step:" incorporate more symbolic metaphors to deepen meaning". However, in another classroom, the teacher simply provided a summary of what the student did on the task, such as "...chooses and carries 2 strategies to solve problems involving dimensions, area and fixed perimeter", without including any next steps to push the student to understand what was needed to get to the next level on the rubric.
- During visits to classrooms some teachers were observed checking for understanding by circulating and conferring with students or using exit tickets at the close of lessons. However, effective adjustments based on findings during meetings with students, were inconsistently made to address misconceptions. For instance, during a 6<sup>th</sup> grade Integrated Collaborative Teaching writing lesson, the teachers circulated to individual students as they worked independently, but provided limited feedback that pushed students' writing. In one instance a student who had incorrectly completed the task was not provided guidance as to how to address it correctly. However, during a math class, the teacher made a mid-lesson interruption based on what she had observed and brought the whole class back to review the concepts of the lesson to ensure clarity for the learners. In addition, while self and peer assessments have begun to take place, which was observed on poetry work on some bulletin boards and during one lesson; this is an emerging practice across classrooms.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

There is consistent communication of high expectations to all staff regarding teaching and learning outcomes aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school effectively communicates with families regarding student progress towards college and career readiness.

### Impact

Feedback and professional learning opportunities hold teachers accountable for improvements in their practice and student learning. The school's communication with families provides opportunities for them to understand student progress towards meeting the standards.

### Supporting Evidence

- Before the start of the school year, school leaders organized a week of professional learning during the summer in order to prepare all staff for the opening of their new school. Staff participated in curriculum development addressing alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards, created unit assessments and was introduced to the school's core values with a focus on the Restorative Practices that are utilized for the advisory program. In addition, staff received a handbook that outlines their professional responsibilities, expectations aligned to unit and lesson planning, professional collaborations and ways to support and engage their students. Prior to the start of each school day, the principal holds early morning meetings for all staff to update them on new instructional strategies, provide them feedback from visits to classrooms, information on professional learning opportunities for the day or week, followed up by written memorandums that memorialize the day's discussion.
- Ongoing visits to classrooms provide opportunities for school leaders to give regular feedback and support to all staff, which informs the school's professional learning plan based on findings from informal and formal visits to teacher's classrooms. Support for teachers is differentiated and provided through in-class modeling by administrators, one-on-one coaching and mentoring on lesson planning and lesson delivery aligned to the instructional foci, support plans for struggling staff, and during after-school professional learning sessions. Feedback provided to teachers on observation reports reflect a focus on the instructional priorities for the year, with specific supports to address gaps in practice and timelines that detail the expectation for implementation within subsequent classroom visits. Teachers confirmed that school leaders regularly visit their classrooms, provide immediate feedback and support as needed and hold them accountable for implementation by following up their visits with a focus on the feedback provided from previous observations.
- Parents are kept abreast of what's happening in the school and with their children's progress through monthly newsletters from the principal and ongoing communication through weekly and sometimes daily phone calls from teachers. The school also utilizes Skedula, an on-line grading system that provides students and their families with up-to-date information on student performance on assessments, homework and classwork. Parents shared that the staff is always readily available to inform them of their child's performance and provide regular supports, such as on-line resources that assist them with the new Common Core expectations that allow them to better support their children at home.