

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Community Voices Middle School

Middle School Q356

**145-00 Springfield Blvd
Queens
NY 11413**

Principal: Tamra S. Collins

**Date of review: January 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Lenon C. Murray**

The School Context

Community Voices Middle School is a middle school with 436 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 92% Black, 6% Hispanic, .4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 5% 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 93.2%.

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	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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

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

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved teacher practice and student progress on assessments. The shared leadership structures build capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher leaders, who represent each subject area department, meet weekly with the instructional cabinet to discuss professional development and teacher practices. They review school data to create solutions and address school-wide gaps and support each other in the implementation of school initiatives. The professional development for the school year has been initiated and sustained by teacher leaders who often act as facilitators. Topics include areas of the Framework for Great Schools.
- Teacher teams meet formally once 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 grade level horizontal teams and the departmental vertical teams. All departmental teams participate in a cycles of inquiry. These cycles of inquiry include a student work protocol, data tracking of a targeted sub-group and specific strategies to address gaps in instruction. Special education students show tremendous improvement in writing to explain their claims while citing text evidence. This was demonstrated on internal writing rubrics that compared December's improved work product with September's effort.
- Teacher teams review the results of data from the New York State exams, Measures of Student Learning, formative assessments and unit assessments. They share ideas to adjust teaching practices and support increased student engagement based on data and student performance tasks. For example, the music teacher is working on integrating literacy into his music. In a lesson on the pentatonic scale, he showed a video of Bobby McFerrin teaching the scale to a general audience. Students were then required to write reflective responses to the lesson.
- Teachers explained that they were empowered to have quality input on decisions affecting the selection and refinement of curricula resources, the placement and grouping of students and the interviewing and selection of new teachers.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While teaching practices provide 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, curricula extensions enable students to produce meaningful work products. However, there are still missed opportunities for all learners (including English language learners and Special education students) to take ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In all classrooms visited, teachers used a modified workshop model of teaching with a mini-lesson followed by demonstration and independent practice. The school makes systematic efforts to promote student voice. An example is the “think, pair, share” protocol in which students who might otherwise be silent are encouraged to discuss in small groups. At other points in the lessons, students worked collaboratively on performance tasks that required deeper thinking. The vast majority of student questions generated were for clarification or basic comprehension.
- The English as a Second Language teacher pulls students out at certain times during the school day or works in the classroom to provide strong support to English language learners. She aligns her instruction with the school’s need to promote writing and speaking proficiency. Students are constantly pushed beyond social language to the development of academic vocabulary.
- During a sixth grade math class, students were assigned to flexible groups based on their aptitude with algebraic concepts. They were required to express the perimeters and areas of common geometric shapes like triangles and pentagons using algebraic expressions. English language learners and struggling students were challenged with differentiating between the common meaning and the mathematical meaning of certain expressions. For example, they struggled with the question of defining the difference between equal and equivalent.
- A review of student portfolios revealed consistent work in argumentative writing, writing to explain and writing on demand. In English Language Arts, for example, the close reading structure pushes students to dig deeper into the text. Teachers create opportunities for students to write short and extended responses to questions that require them to infer from the text. The work products reflected high levels of student thinking even though feedback from teachers was brief. Students were able to discuss the level of their work when asked.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school's curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the content standards. Higher-order skills are consistently emphasized for all learners across grades and content areas.

Impact

The school's decisions about curricula build coherence while promoting college and career readiness for all learners including English language learners and Special education students. Academic tasks are carefully designed to push student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Reading, writing and content area units of study are adjusted by teacher teams to integrate the instructional shifts across content areas. Some examples of intentional strategies include tiered-academic vocabulary and word walls, fluency in literacy and numeracy, problem-solving strategies and text-based writing using complex primary and secondary sources.
- Curricula maps indicate that the school develops and adapts rigorous academic tasks through the resources available from Engage NY, the Department of Education's Common Core Library, and the New York City social studies and science scope and sequence.
- Lesson Plans were available for all the visited classrooms. They included learning targets, the Common Core Standard addressed, the assessment, the lesson agenda, essential vocabulary, the "Do Now" and the motivation. They each included a range of questions from basic comprehension to higher-order thinking questions.
- Unit plans in all content areas illustrated many different designs of academic tasks with many scaffolds for all students. Teachers coach college and career readiness skills such as note-taking, project-based learning, debate and discussion techniques and research skills. Strategies for supporting English language learners and special education students include sentence starters, graphic organizers, discussion prompts, video clips, audio books and visual cues.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments across classrooms in all grades and subject areas. They track student progress and consistently use checks for understanding.

Impact

The school's systems that monitor progress during instruction and through data analysis are used regularly to guide adjustments in units and lessons to meet students' educational needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses common assessments in all content areas which provide information on student performance and progress. Some of these assessments include pre and post assessments with each unit of study, Measures of Student Learning assessments, grade-wide formative and summative assessments and chapter quizzes and tests.
- The math departmental team focused on analyzing formative assessments and journal reflections to develop scaffolds for students including English language learners and special education students. Some of the methods include modeling procedures of problem solving with a systematic approach that can be replicated, guided group practice, peer coaching with clear explanations and mathematical reasoning.
- Across classrooms teachers use multiple measures as checks for understanding. These include asking probing questions of the whole class or small groups, individualized conferring, exit slips, peer-to-peer student checklists and task-specific rubrics. Students also use self-assessment checklists on a regular basis and deliver peer feedback. Teacher adjustments that were observed included additional time in guided reading or for class assignments, graphic organizers, changes in the lexile-level of reading material and the use of technology.
- Teachers' conference notes indicated that formative assessments lead to fairly quick adjustments including regrouping of students during the lesson and re-teaching concepts to struggling students.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

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

Impact

Structures that support the school’s high expectations build collaboration 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 individualized feedback to teachers using the Danielson Framework. Classroom inter-visitations, professional development and numerous conversations among the faculty hold staff accountable for meeting expectations.
- Monthly parent newsletters, regular parent workshops and parent links to the school’s website promote clear communication to families on the school’s expectations and a clear path to college and career readiness. Parents send and receive updated communication on Skedula. They use e-mail daily for queries and concerns regarding their children’s performance.
- Parents shared their satisfaction with the school’s emphasis on college and career readiness which culminates in both a career day and a college day. Many professional people from the community visit the school to offer a perspective on the limitless possibilities for productive employment beyond school and college. Teachers send consistent progress reports by email, phone and in letters in addition to the standard report cards.
- The school has a trained Positive Behavior Intervention (PBIS) team that collaborates with parents to promote the social-emotional wellbeing of each child. The student handbook outlines both academic and behavioral expectations. The Code of Excellence which promotes the school values of achievement, collaboration and character are displayed in every classroom.