



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School

31R063

**100 Essex Drive
Staten Island
NY 10314**

Principal: Cara DeAngelo

**Date of review: December 15, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Roxan Marks**

The School Context

Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School is a middle school with 442 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 7% Black, 17% Hispanic, 62% White, and 11% Asian students. The student body includes .23% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 is 96.2%

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	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

The school has created a culture of high expectations with an emphasis on collaboration, accountability ensuring that social and emotional supports are in place and teachers are responsible for groups of students. The “Crew” structure ensures students have guidance and advisement incorporates team building activities and Habits of Success results in student ownership of learning, parent engagement in learning and values leading to college career readiness.

Impact

School leaders and teachers effectively provide high expectations which results in students being supported academically, participating in service learning and prepared for college and careers.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Crew to establish a culture of trust, respect as students develop intellectually, socially, physically and artistically. The goal of this structure is to create a close and familiar environment that supports students academically, engage them in meaningful service learning while participating in collaborative team building activities. Incoming sixth grade students are assigned a Crew leader that remains with them for the duration of their time in middle school. The crew leader serves as the primary academic and emotional support for the student and communicates with family members, other teachers and attends special events for the student. Students participate in discussions, journal writing and reflection to begin to connect their learning experiences and their readiness for the next level of high school and beyond. The Crew meets twice a week and students work towards the culminating ritual entitled “passages” where students review and reflect upon the year and their academic and social-emotional growth.
- Habit of Success authentically grew out of the Crew structure and provides opportunities for students to track their progress in developing responsibility, maturity and integrity. The founding principles of Habits of Success are perseverance, commitment to high quality, accountability with no excuses and time management. Teachers have embedded these principles within their classrooms and it permeates the culture of the school. Habit of Success is aligned to academic and personal behaviors needed to ensure students are college and career ready.
- High expectations are continuously messaged by the principal and communicated through the staff handbook, weekly bulletins and classroom/ bulletin board checklists. Teachers set personal goals based on Danielson observation data and their own reflections on pedagogical area of needs. Professional development is ongoing as teams participate in instructional rounds, inquiry teams and students advisory activities.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teachers use a variety of assessment data to create a picture of academic mastery and to inform modifications to units, lessons and grouping. Learning tracker targets are used to group students for instruction and checks for understandings are engrained in the learning organization.

Impact

The school ensures that students own their educational experience and confer regularly with the Crew leaders about their work habits and goals. Student led conferences allow students to demonstrate and reflect upon their progress and take ownership and make meaning of their learning experiences. However the school community needs to further align the grading of work and make revisions to the existing policy.

Supporting Evidence

- Student Assessment Notebooks (SAN) connect learning targets to Common Core Learning Standards and are used by students to track their progress throughout the year while reflecting on learning targets and goals. This notebook houses the evidence for students and after pre-assessments are administered students create goals. Teachers use a similar system, Teacher Assessment Notebooks (TANs) to collect various data including assessments, observations notes, conferencing and other documentation to track and monitor student work. Engrade is used to report grades and share progress reports with families.
- A notable feature in the school is Student Led Conferences (SLCs) which provides students with reflective practices linked to 21st Century Skills. Students take ownership of the conference and prepare in advance to discuss their contributions to the greater school community, progress and challenges they face and finally setting goals and sharing their plans for the remainder of the semester.
- During the meeting with parents, most commented on how the culture supports their children and fosters independence and personal growth. Many commented how well their children are able to articulate concerning their learning and that they are clear of the next steps needed to improve their learning. Students regularly confer with Crew teachers about the goals and Habits of Success are used to monitor work habits and ensure student ownership of learning.
- Teachers use data to track and monitor progress and growth paying close attention to students scoring in the lowest third. Tracking sheets are customized for units of study and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards. Subject area teachers collaboratively plan lesson and assessments in order to ensure alignment of instructional supports for students they serve.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

The school curricula in all areas are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and all students are engaged in rigorous learning tasks to promote deep thinking. The 21st Century Skills are embedded in coherent ways in the curricula providing critical thinking, problem solving, interdisciplinary learning, collaboration and teamwork.

Impact

Teachers and school leaders make strategic choices in designing and executing the curricula which fosters higher order thinking and discussion across all subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- The school curricula plans incorporate the instructional shifts and teachers create unit plans and lessons to support the long term learning targets to allow for evidence of mastery. Teams of teachers collaboratively develop tasks and plan for interdisciplinary connections across the grades. Long term targets provide the students with a deep understanding of the rationale for learning content and skills. Teachers have approximately 6-10 long term targets to focus on and targets are aligned with CCLS. The school uses Tapestry's Long-Term Learning Targets Rubric to support the alignment, scope, assess-ability, friendless, context and rigor.
- The school uses case studies approach that is built into the curriculum maps that allows for in depth learning about a concept, ideology, program or system. Case studies ensure all students are immersed in content and they are encouraged to make interdisciplinary connections. There are approximately two assessments of learning inserted into the units which assesses the long term targets. Case study results with culminating projects or products which answers the guided question of the expedition. The school hosts Exhibition night which enables students to show the process of learning rather than the final product and allows students to be reflective about their work. In an 8th grade science lesson observed, the lesson was developed from the case study about Tay Sachs – Dangerous DNA, and the long term target was to describe the relationship between the structure and function of DNA.
- Teacher teams design tasks that promote higher order thinking skills that provide academic challenge and independent thinking connected to real world experiences. Advance learners are provided with independent study allowing them to extend their knowledge and go deeper into content.
- School leaders and teachers conduct item analysis of the New York State English language arts and mathematics assessments to identify key standards that students have not mastered. During planning days the departments use ATLAS protocol along with a school created noticing sheet to look closely at the data to identify trends. Using the backward planning method, teachers modify unit plans and make adjustment to the units. This year the school revised the math sequence for grade 7 regarding geometry and moved it to later in the school year to provide intense study of other content requiring more development.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

The vast majority of classrooms students are engaged in activities with rigorous cognitive demands including high levels of discussion among students without scaffolds from the teachers. The use of various protocols in classrooms allows student tools to extend their thinking and make meaning as they engage in learning content.

Impact

All classrooms teachers delivered lessons aligned to Danielson Framework for Teachers and allowed students to interact with subject matter through high levels engagement, discourse resulting in meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In an 8th grade math lesson the focus for students was to understand that a two-dimensional figure is congruent to another if the second can be obtained from the first by a sequence of rotations, reflections and translations. The teacher prepared an additional activity for those students working at a faster pace and used a timer to pace the lesson. Students independently worked on a brain starter activity followed by focused questions by the teacher who checked for understanding using a show of fingers on a scale of one to five.
- During a 7th grade Integrated Co-Teaching social studies lesson on the American Revolution, students were working on determining whether colonists were justified in creating their own identity or remain loyal to Britain. Using the Socratic seminar, students were seated in two large circles with the inner group discussing the topic and the outer circle taking notes using the discussion note taker. Students evaluated their peers using a rubric and each circle had approximately ten minutes to discuss. The teacher monitored the activity and called on a student that did not participate. Students assessed their peers and provided a grow area as a goal for the next discussion.
- All teachers follow the workshop model and rubrics are standards-based which affords students to use it to peer assess and provide next steps to their fellow classmates. During classroom visits students self-assessed using a rubric, participated in discussions with peers and asked critical thinking questions. Students used the strategy of restate, answer, text-based and explain as an expectation for short responses. Across classrooms, students worked independently and in various group structures based on data, interest and choice. Discussion protocols such as Say Something was used to ensure all students make meaningful contributions and develop the skills needed to serve as leaders.
- Across classrooms teachers strategically used scaffolds and multiple entry points to provide access to content for all students. During lessons, teachers used various types of graphic organizers and mental models to support different types of learners. Teachers tailored instruction based on exit tickets from prior lessons and thoughtfully arranged groups to reflect needs of students.

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

Findings

All teachers participate in various team structures to support academic and social-emotional development. Teams continuously look at assessment data and student work products to make effective adjustments in their practice.

Impact

The work of teams has resulted in strengthening teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet in a variety of configurations including departmental, inter-departmental grade level team, Crew, co-teachers and other structures representative of support staff. Teams keep in mind the overarching goal of the instructional focus and establish desired outcomes for their work during the year. Agendas are maintained and customized protocols are used that best support the purpose needed by the team. School leaders visit the team meetings and team leaders schedule time on a weekly basis to articulate with school administration. School leaders have created structures to ensure alignment in the work for all teams.
- The department leads serve as support for the instructional core and teachers model lesson and provide demonstrations for their peers. These leads open their classrooms for colleagues for inter-visitations to support the improvement in pedagogy, share effective and best strategies to support student learning. There is a strong professional environment and teachers are open to feedback and support each other in a culture of collaboration, trust, respect and ongoing professional learning.
- Teacher teams use the inquiry process to structure their meetings. Analysis of student work and assessment data enables the teams to refine curricula, identify trends, patterns, plan lessons and units of study. A grade level team observed, used the Four A's protocol to examine writing and used a graphic organizer created by the team to make notes with suggested feedback for the presenting teacher.
- Distributive leadership is evident throughout the school and during the teacher team meeting specific examples was provided. Teachers take ownership and shared responsibility in supporting each other by providing professional development activities during grade and department meetings. Teacher leads were instrumental in developing the professional learning plan using the strategies outline in Planning Professional Learning from Educational Leadership and ensured alignment with the instructional focus. Teams play a vital role in modifying curricula, acquisition of resource materials and the adaptations of the Crew to ensure Passages come alive in classrooms.