



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The William W. Niles School

Middle School X118

**577 East 179th Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Giulia Cox

**Date of review: April 28, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Maria Giacone**

The School Context

The William W. Niles School is a middle school with 1201 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 23% Black, 62% Hispanic, 3% White, and 12% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 19% 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 91.0%.

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	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	Additional Findings	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	Developing
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	Focus	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards with an emphasis on the instructional shifts and higher-order skills across grades and subject areas.

Impact

All students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, are exposed to higher-level tasks and are provided supports to access those tasks leading to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades teachers ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Key curricula for literacy and math are Code X and CMP3 and teacher teams ensure that a common curriculum is accessible to all students with appropriate supports and extensions. One English language arts teacher gave an example, “All students on a grade are doing the same three unit tasks on the map, some with additional supports, some with extensions. The fourth task is the teacher’s choice, depending on the needs of the students.”
- Curricula undergo a process of refinement in the effort to ensure that they are standards-aligned and that they respond to students’ needs. Based on assessment results, teachers aligned the math curriculum map to the instructional shifts specifically focusing on fluency, depth of knowledge, conceptual understanding and application. The revised map that includes elements from EngageNY allowed teachers to develop and adapt units aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.
- Across grades and subjects curricular tasks are designed to be rigorous. For example, a 6th grade task combines features of science, math and English language arts by asking students to analyze and interpret resource availability on the populations of Canadian lynx and the snowshoe hare by designing a graph, predicting patterns of interactions, calculating the mean absolute deviation, and constructing an argument by addressing how human impact affects the interdependent relationship between the two species. An 8th grade English language arts task poses the questions, “How do social constructs directly affect low-income students from achieving success at the collegiate level?” and, “How might the United States be able to have more generational mobility by having low-income students achieve success at the college level?”
- Embedded in curricular documents are supports for English language learners and students with disabilities so that they can access Common Core-aligned tasks. For example, for 7th grade lessons on percent proportions there are differentiated problems by level of difficulty that address the standards.

Area of Focus

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

Teachers are engaged in professional collaborations and teacher teams are in the process of creating structures to organize around specific team goals that are aligned to school-wide goals or goals for identified groups of students.

Impact

Teacher team collaborations are beginning to result in improved teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students leading to enhancement of teacher practice and improved student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The majority of teachers are engaged in a variety of collaborative teams including the school's academy teams focused on school community initiatives, departmental teams with a focus on curriculum refinements, and informal collegial teams that come together around a particular topic or question such as determining which Tier 2 focus words to include in 6th grade instruction. While teams meet regularly, structures to organize around specific team goals that are aligned to the school-wide instructional focus with measures of team accountability for enhanced teacher practice and improved student achievement are still evolving.
- The use of the inquiry approach is evident in some team structures, but not in others. For example, Teacher Center collaborations are structured around a protocol to surface best practices among a group of teachers so that others could then implement those strategies in their classrooms and report on them. However, the systematic practice among members of a team to analyze both student and teacher work for students on whom they are focused with a view towards improving teacher practice and making progress towards goals for those students is not yet embedded in the collaborative nature of the teams.
- Teacher teams look at assessment data and discuss next steps. For example, during a teacher team observed, an academy math team saw that students were having difficulty with equations and expressions. The team considered including for both 6th and 7th grades more instructional time on one-step equations and emphasizing the difference between equations and expressions. While teams look at student work and consider instructional modifications, they are not yet specifically designed to examine progress of students towards specifically defined student goals with systematic tracking of student progress as well as the team's efforts towards its own success in moving students to the next level and enhancing teacher practice.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies and scaffolds inconsistently provide multiple entry points to cognitively engage all students. Work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

Across classrooms, there are missed opportunities to engage all learners in consistent challenging tasks and higher order thinking thus hindering students from exhibiting their work at high levels.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms visited, there was some evidence of teaching strategies that provided multiple entry points for students to access the curriculum including the use of SMARTboards, graphic organizers, and modeling. However, strategies were uneven across classrooms. In most classes, students were not strategically grouped to allow differentiation of instruction so that all students could be engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. In a 7th grade class with English language learners, groups were mixed with varying language abilities and given the same graphic organizer. In another class with students of varying English language proficiency, all students were tasked with underlining aspects of figurative language and although the text was read aloud in both English and Spanish, some students missed some of the figurative language phrases or underlined incorrectly.
- In some classes students were given opportunities to engage in talk to think through a question. In a 6th grade math class students were asked to apply their knowledge of percent's and unit rates to shopping. Working in pairs with appropriately leveled tasks, students examined real world advertisements and worked collaboratively to figure out the unit price, determine the "best buy", and explain their solutions. However, in other classes there were missed opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking through discussion. For example, in a 7th grade lesson on describing the properties of translation, students were asked to work individually on their handouts without having had an opportunity to engage with other students in partnerships or small groups to think through the problems before addressing them individually. In an 8th grade class, students were asked to write down responses in their notebooks using evidence from their text but did not have a chance to engage in discussion with each other in a small group formation to ensure that all students in the group could share and expand their thinking.
- In some classes, teacher questions and tasks allowed students to demonstrate higher order thinking. For example, in preparation for analyzing political cartoons highlighting the controversies of the Nixon administration and the Watergate scandal, students in an 8th grade social studies class were asked to think about who might be represented in such a cartoon and why. Students were then asked to refer to their list of peers they were slated to meet with and go to their "3rd appointment" to engage in discussion. However, in other classes there were missed opportunities to engage students in cognitively challenging interactions. In an English language arts class, the teacher asked such questions as, "Is 'consequence' a good or bad word?" "Can an old lady be a monster?" "How are young people discriminated against?" These questions elicited single student responses with many students not volunteering to answer thus missing an opportunity for all students to be engaged in productive discussion.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The use of common assessments to measure student progress towards goals is at an evolving stage and while some teachers engage in practices to check for understanding, those practices are inconsistently used to make effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

Impact

Results of common assessments and checks for understanding are inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction thus hindering progress towards student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, common assessments are in place. In some cases, results have been used to adjust curricula and instruction. For example, when 5th grade teachers noted that item analysis of the results on the 5th grade state test revealed that multiplying fractions was a weakness, they expanded their coverage of that topic to include more real world problems to increase the focus on this area. However, across the school, the practice of continuously analyzing assessment results at benchmark intervals to inform and adjust instructional practice on a grade or by academy is inconsistent.
- In some cases assessment data is used to determine student groupings. For example, Achieve 3000 data informs how students are grouped to receive further instruction and support for English language arts and social studies lessons. Lesson plans revealed that students in a 7th grade class were to be grouped heterogeneously with a purposeful mix of Lexile levels, and students in a 7th grade science class were to be given leveled questions. However, student work and data used to inform the grouping of students to tailor instruction to their specific needs is not a consistent practice across the school.
- In some classes, teachers used various means to check for understanding, which included circulating, annotating, and asking questions. When the teacher noticed that a student in a 6th grade math class got the answer "5.1" when calculating a price, the teacher called the class to attention to probe and clarify what the answer would be in dollars and cents and ended by saying, "If it's money, it's two places past the decimal point in America." In this way both a math and a cultural point were clarified. In a 7th grade English language arts class, the teacher observed students and annotated their responses during discussion. This information, along with written responses from exit slips, determines grouping and supports. However, in other classes checks for understanding did not lead to on-the-spot adjustments for students who struggled or were not engaged, nor did they lead to necessary adjustments allowing a group of students or the whole class to obtain clarity on a point or redirect their approach to a task.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders convey high expectations to staff through the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, provide professional development opportunities, and hold staff accountable to those expectations. Leadership and staff successfully communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness with families to support student progress.

Impact

Collaboration among all school stakeholders fosters ongoing communication of high expectations providing a clear path towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff through various means including a faculty and staff handbook and written memos that contain specific reminders and tips regarding instructional practices. Under the instruction heading, one memo included, “Do you have a rubric for group work? Think about how you hold each student accountable for a group assignment or project. Think about setting clear expectations in a rubric.”
- Teachers are held accountable to the school-wide instructional foci on discussion and active intellectual engagement while incorporating checks for understanding and feedback to students. Lesson observation comments and suggestions speak directly to these foci. One comment read, “...extend your discussion structures so that all students can participate directly with one another. This will align with our assessment structures by having the students critique one another’s work.” To address peer feedback and intellectual engagement, a comment and suggestion read, “Students who were writing at a level above the others were not receiving feedback from their peers that was improving their writing, just correcting their mistakes. Model ...questions to guide students to elicit more from their partners. This way, students can...engage each other in deeper learning about their writing process.” A suggestion to enhance checks for understanding read, “... Provide an area in an exit slip that states, ‘Was there any part of this lesson that was unclear to you?’”
- Communication to parents includes letters, newsletters, emails and phone calls. During a parent meeting, parents spoke about having an open relationship with teachers, assistant principals, the principal and guidance counselors. They regularly receive information regarding their children’s progress, missing assignments, behavior, and other issues. “Communication is great,” stated one parent. “I request a parent meeting (and) they’ll get all of the teachers to meet with me.” Another parent said, “I’ve seen some rubrics come home. The goal is to get to 4. Here’s why you got the 3 and that’s what you need to do to get to 4.” Still another parent commented, “I got a call from the teacher concerning my son—that he’s been quiet lately. Now I’m paying attention to him to see if anything’s wrong.” “Even the safety officer tells me if my son’s having a good day,” one more parent said.
- The school solicits feedback from parents in order to strengthen parent involvement and respond to their needs. One parent’s feedback read, “The school does a good job of informing me of my child’s grades and behavior with letting me know about my child’s grades and behavior. It could do better with access to online gradebooks to keep up with work, assignments and assessments that are missing or coming up.” Parents spoke about access to Jupiter Grades and Engrade as online systems that help them understand their children’s progress and that their request to expand them will be realized.