



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

School of Performing Arts

Middle School X217

**977 Fox Street
Bronx
NY 10459**

Principal: Maiysha Etienne

**Date of review: February 13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Rafaela Espinal**

The School Context

MS 217 is a middle school with 340 students from 6th grade through 8th grade. The school population comprises 28% Black, 67% Hispanic, 0.59% White, and 0.59% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.6%.

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	Developing
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	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	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on teams, but the work does not typically result in progress toward goals for students.

Impact

Although teachers have more ownership of professional learning time and structured opportunities for collaboration, the use of an inquiry approach is developing across the teams and teachers are beginning to make decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders set up professional learning teams at the beginning of the year and set up protocols for teacher engagement. The Assistant Principal attends the team meetings for teachers of Science and ELA, while the Principal attends Social Studies and Math department meetings. In agendas reviewed, team structures and roles were defined so that teachers take turns facilitating meetings.
- The schedule revealed that teachers have opportunities for common planning time. Content area teachers meet as departments that allow teachers to focus on developing in their content area specialties and to meet as teacher teams to plan and revise curriculum. These are called Professional Learning Teams (PLT). Each day of the week a different department meets during PLTs (4th and 5th period of each day), which is built into the daily schedule. In the teacher meeting observed the ELA and Social Studies departments across grades were reviewing the latest student assessment data and student work. Although the teachers identified the common mistakes in student work, the reflections focused on the strategies they needed to do better for test taking and were not tied to the instructional goal or progress towards individual student goals. For example, rereading the question, focusing on tricky language, and directions for grading were some of the thoughts shared.
- The practice of examining student work and adjusting pedagogical practices based on team outcomes are not yet consistent across teacher teams. Analysis within teams is beginning to improve teaching and curricula. Protocols are emerging in the identification of the specific needs and strategies they need to diagnose when looking at student work in teacher teams.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are not typically aligned to the curricula and do not reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect a general lack of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teaching practices do not provide scaffolds for all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWD), to achieve mastery of content standards; therefore, not all students' work products and discussions reflected high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal reported that the school's shared belief about teaching and learning included teacher modeling, flexible grouping, and scaffolded instruction to support diverse learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities. However across classrooms visited, teaching strategies do not align to the school's shared beliefs. For example, in some classes, students worked independently on a writing task, and the adults provided feedback on the completion of the task rather than feedback on specific writing strategies. Additionally, evidence of teacher modeling, flexible grouping, and scaffolded instruction was not observed. In five out of seven classrooms there was whole group instruction from the front of the room. In the other two classrooms observed students worked independently on the same task.
- The school also believes that middle school students learn best when engaged in active intellectually challenging tasks that relate to the real world (as posted in the teacher meeting room and where teachers referred to the charts posted when asked about the school's focus), but this was not evident across classrooms. Across classrooms the practices observed did not reflect the espoused beliefs. Students were not able to explain what they were doing and why in most classes. In one out of seven classrooms observed the teacher explained the relevance of calculating percentages and the relevance to the students' real life experiences. For example, one group of in that class stated, "This is part of our daily life if we go shopping." In a special needs room one out of the 13 students named the connection of learning about slavery and segregation "so that we don't judge people."
- Across classrooms teachers did not develop or provide challenging tasks to engage all students in high levels of thinking and participation. Teacher voice dominated and there was minimal participation in discussions related to the lesson or to advance student thinking. Questions included: "Can you name a plant that bees eat?" "How are you going to find 10% of 15%?" "If I am plotting where will I put my variable?." These questions were heard in separate classrooms; however, they were teacher directed to individual students. There were limited opportunities for all students to demonstrate higher order thinking and discussions in order to produce meaningful work products.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School staff is beginning to develop Common Core aligned units emphasizing key standards and the instructional shifts. Emerging curricula reflects planning to provide students access, but they are not yet refined to cognitively engage all students, including lowest and highest achieving students.

Impact

A diversity of learners is not cognitively engaged in refined academic tasks, and the school's curricular decisions are resulting in minimal improvement in student achievement. Curricula and academic tasks are not yet designed to engage students, advance them through the content, and assess their understanding as evidenced by their work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps include Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), and instructional shifts are noted, but there is no explicit connection to college and career. There were overarching units presented, yet adjustments were not evident. Maps need to be coherent across grades and subjects and promote college and career readiness.
- The school utilizes the NYC core curriculum for social studies and science, CMP3 for math, and Expeditionary Learning for ELA. School leaders shared that teams of teachers met over the summer to modify the curriculum, and they continue to meet to implement further refinements based on student data. However, the school did not provide a data-based rationale that identifies areas of growth or achievement gaps for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities and other subgroups, nor explain how curricula and academic tasks are refined accordingly so that all students access curricula and tasks consistent with the academic expectations for that grade level or beyond.
- Although unit maps named the CCLS with the number, objective, and the focus standards, and teachers stated that they focus on instructional shifts include citing text evidence, fluency in math; school leaders and teachers could not cite how curricula, across and within grade levels, are aligned to promote college and career readiness for all students.
- Sixth and 7th grade "Six week Instructional Plans" reviewed did not contain differentiation that would provide access to all learners. Plans did not incorporate appropriate, varied tasks, resources and materials to demonstrate a progression of sequenced scaffolded materials to meet the needs of all groups of students. One out seven lesson plans reviewed contained materials that provided two different graphic organizers (one with a sentence starter and one without).

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress, enabling teachers to identify students' needs. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of on-going checks for understanding. Across classrooms, the school feedback to students regarding achievement is limited.

Impact

Inconsistencies in providing students with actionable feedback as well as using checks for understanding to inform timely instructional adjustments limit student and teacher ability to use feedback to improve teaching and learning. Students are not aware of their next learning step.

Supporting Evidence

- Although the teachers use common assessment practices they do not yet reflect ongoing checks for understanding to make effective adjustments to instruction and provide feedback so that all students' learning needs are met. In all classrooms, lessons kept going as planned (as stated in the plans) and observed. For example, in a math class there were groups of students who had a language barrier, and the lesson continued.
- The school is developing in their use of common assessments and then norming their interpretation of evidence practices to evaluate student performance based on data collected from mid-unit and end unit assessments in ELA and math. In the content team observed teachers were working in grade band groups and analyzing the assessments. It was not yet clear how the results would be used to make adjustments.
- The majority of student work reviewed in student portfolios was either ungraded or only contained checks or numerical scores. While discussing work products with students, the presence of actionable feedback was also inconsistent. They included: an assignment where the student earned a 100, with no feedback; a math assignment that only had the number "5" written at the top, and multiple choice tasks that only had scores on them. When asked about the feedback they receive students responded that they do not always get feedback. One student said, "I get a lot of feedback saying do better and work harder."
- Feedback to students was limited or of poor quality and a system for providing regular, explicit, and consistent feedback from both teachers and peers has not been developed. Student work that was displayed on bulletin boards included comments such as, "Practice reading aloud what your write. I understand what you are saying, but in English it does not make sense what you wrote." In one math class the teacher conferred with students and wrote feedback on their paper. In another class the teacher carried a checklist on a clipboard. In a class of students with special needs the teachers corrected the student work by making the corrections for the students and writing on their work. There were missed opportunities within these classrooms and in other classes to give students actionable feedback that is aligned to the school's curriculum and achievement towards student goals.
- Teachers in teams are beginning to determine important topics to assess with common formative assessments. Teachers have just started to unpack the standards and analyze the instructional shifts for those topics to pinpoint concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do. However, the use of that information for differentiation at the classroom level and for individual and/or groups of students was not evident during most observations, in a majority of plans, and student work.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations to the entire staff and are developing training and a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders are developing systems to provide feedback to families.

Impact

As a result, the school is developing systems that are connected to a path toward college and career readiness and beginning to provide supports to achieve high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff members have established new systems for communicating with families to deepen their understanding of grade-level requirements, CCLS standards, and college and career readiness. These systems include their 6th Grade Orientation, September Curriculum Night, Monthly Curriculum Workshops, Student/Family Handbook, progress reports, on-line grade book, and website.
- The school is developing systems to provide feedback to families. The school is using Datacation so that parents and staff can see where students stand relative to performance standards. As part of parent teacher conferences parents are shown the students “High School Readiness” tracker on Skedula (an on-line grade book) which predicts students high school readiness based on course grades, attendance, and state exam scores.
- Parents receive feedback regarding student progress via newly established progress reports and parents feel that teachers have an open door to discuss progress towards expectations. The school has instituted an extended parent teacher conference program so that parents are able to meet with their child’s advisor. In addition, all teachers from a grade meet in one large classroom so that parents are able to easily meet with other teachers in the grade.
- School leaders communicate expectations to staff through the observation and feedback process based on the elements of the Danielson Framework for teaching. The principal has created a feedback document so that there is transparency of feedback across leaders and so that they can track progress in the implementation of feedback and expectations.
- Expectations are communicated through newsletters, emails, professional learning teams, staff handbook, parent/student handbook.