

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The Alexander Macomb's Middle School**

**Middle School X232**

**1700 Macombs Road  
Bronx  
NY 10453**

**Principal: Neifi Acosta**

**Date of review: May 14, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Cheryl McClendon**

## The School Context

The Alexander Maccomb's Middle School is a middle school with 560 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 79% Hispanic, 20% Black, and 01% White students. The student body includes 36% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.1%.

## 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>Proficient</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>Proficient</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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured teacher team meeting with a focus on the implementation of the CCLS and the achievement of school goals. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

### Impact

Teacher team meetings promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, the achievement of school wide goals and support teacher capacity and student progress.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders shared that teachers meet regularly in teams to fine-tune curricular goals and priorities through the analysis of student work and data. Additionally, they shared that the professional development team is key in identifying professional development priorities for the school and designing plans for teacher support sessions.
- Teacher teams are representative of all of the programs within the school. Every teacher team has the representation of special education teachers, bilingual program teachers and general education teachers. Teacher team members asserted that this allows the needs of every population to be considered and discussed during all team meetings.
- As observed during the 7<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts team meeting, teachers used the “Analyzing and Learning from Student Work” protocol as a student literary response writing sample. After presenting, a teacher shared the sample; team members analyzed the work for 10 minutes. Subsequently, they discussed writing strategies that the student used, the student’s level of proficiency, and suggested next steps for the student. Teachers also integrated English-as-a Second language strategies into the dialogue because the focal student was an English Language Learner.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect beliefs about how students learn best as informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and student work. Teaching strategies consistently provided multiple entry points that engaged all learners in appropriately challenging tasks and higher-order thinking. However these practices and strategies were not observed in some classes.

### Impact

Danielson-aligned teaching practices and effective teaching strategies promote high-level engagement and elicit higher-order thinking in all classes, where implemented.

### Supporting Evidence

- In a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts class, students were observed working in small groups to analyze the main character within the graphic novel, “American Born Chinese”. The guiding question, “What do you think about how the main character is being treated?” elicited higher-order responses, such as, “He feels disrespected and discriminated against. It’s like that sometimes when you are from another culture. It’s not right, but that’s how it is.” The teacher circulated to listen in and push students’ thinking by posing reflective questions. Students who were grouped for targeted support were provided with a template to organize their responses, while the para-professional sat with them to provide guidance. This level of support and provision of multiple entry points was observed in many classes, but not all. For example, in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade math class a teacher-centered lesson on symmetry was observed in which there were no evident scaffolds and questions were low-level; eliciting only one-word responses from students.
- In many classrooms, students were engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. Notably, students in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade math class were engaged in a collaborative math game that required them to create equations using three numbers drawn from a deck of cards and combined mathematical operations to equal or come closest to a given number. As students collaborated in groups to manipulate the given numbers and the various operations, a high level of engagement and use of math vocabulary was observed. The teacher circulated to check in and provide support. The appropriateness of the task and this teacher’s facilitation elicited a level of engagement and higher-order thinking that was not observed in a couple of classrooms that were visited.
- In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Regents track United States history class, the level 4 question (as measured by the Depth of Knowledge scale) “Do you think that Germany should be blamed for World War I? Why or why not?” launched students into in a lively discussion about *appeasement*, *inflation* and other factors that contributed to or emerged from the era. The teacher consistently re-focused the students on providing research-based evidence for the claims and inferences that they made during the high-level discussion.

## Additional Findings

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

Curricula and academic tasks that are planned and refined using student work and data, provide access and engagement and consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills for all students.

### Impact

The planning and implementation of Common Core aligned curricula promotes engagement, rigor and higher-order thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Codex for English language arts instruction and Connected Math Project 3 for instruction in math. The principal and faculty selected these programs for their alignment with the Common Core Learning standards. In order to reinforce Common Core-alignment and rigor, teacher teams modify Codex units of study by shifting the order of units, as well as integrating supplemental Common Core aligned materials, where necessary.
- Core curricula are implemented Monday through Thursday of every week. School leaders shared that every Friday, across grades and subjects, students engage in the Peer-Teacher Accountable Talk model. This is a school-developed reciprocal teaching model. The faculty has compiled a Peer-Teacher Accountable Talk binder on every grade, containing Common Core-aligned performance-based collaborative tasks. Every Friday, in every course, teachers introduce a task that is related to the current unit of study and students engage in reciprocal teaching as the teacher monitors performance and serves as facilitator.
- Social Studies and science units of study are developed in alignment with the New York City scope and sequence in social studies and the New York State science standards. Pacing calendars have been established for all core curricula.

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

Across classrooms, teachers' use of assessments, rubrics and standardized grading policies are aligned with the curricula and facilitate actionable feedback to students and teachers. Common assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### **Impact**

Teachers' use of assessments and rubrics facilitate instructional and curricular refinements to improve student achievement.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Across grades and classes, a 10 minute curriculum-based quiz is administered at the beginning of every period throughout the day. School leaders stated that the results are used to inform targeted and strategic instruction for the week.
- The school uses the MyOn digital literacy program. Through this online program students' Lexile levels are calculated at benchmark periods throughout the year. Teachers track this data to ensure that students are reading texts at their independent levels as well as to plan for strategic reading groups.
- Across the grades, Common Core performance tasks are administered during every English language arts and math unit. Students are provided with Common Core performance task rubrics at the beginning of each unit to use as a scaffold as they work through the comprehensive performance-based task. Teachers provide written rubric-aligned feedback to students. Students' performance is tracked and analyzed to inform instructional modifications as well as to identify candidates for the Saturday intervention program.
- School leaders shared that across the grades any score below 80% is considered not meeting standard. Students who fall in this category in core subject areas are identified for remediation during the school day and during the Saturday intervention program.

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

School leaders communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training to support teachers in meeting those expectations. School leaders and faculty communicate college and career readiness expectations and ongoing feedback on student progress to families.

**Impact**

Teachers are supported in meeting the expectations of school leaders through professional development. Parents feel informed and well-supported by the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School wide expectations are communicated to the entire staff through the school handbook and weekly administrative memos. Based upon school wide goals and data analysis, the professional development team develops professional development covering topics such as: writing goals for individualized educational plans, the role of the para-professional, differentiating instruction, higher-order thinking skills, Common Core Learning Standards and Danielson Framework for Teaching.
- During the parent meeting, parents expressed satisfaction with the school’s communication with families, stating that teachers and school leaders communicate in writing and via telephone regularly. Parents receive progress reports every 3 months. All parents expressed that the principal is accessible and maintains a focus on preparing their children for college. A parent stated that her son really benefits from the math enrichment and sports program that is facilitated during the week days.
- The school has established the highly successful International Student Travel Program. Born of the principal’s vision to expose students from lower-income families to international travel through which they are immersed in world cultures, the program has contributed to broadening perspectives and raising academic and cultural expectations school wide. This donor-sponsored selective program provides an incentive for students to work hard to excel academically and demonstrate exemplary citizenship skills every year. This year the travel group visited Athens, Greece.
- As cited by school leaders, the school introduces algebra and United States history Regents classes in grade 8. Presently there are four Regents classes. There are plans to expand to five classes next year.