



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The Forward School**

**Middle School X287**

**3710 Barnes Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10467**

**Principal: Magdalen Neyra**

**Date of review: May 8, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

## The School Context

The Forward School is a middle school with 287 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 63% Black, 29% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% Asian and 5% American Indian or Alaskan native students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89.2%.

## 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>Developing</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>Celebration</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

### Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

### Impact

The ongoing and detailed feedback offered by the school helps families understand student progress towards high expectations and guidance supports help to prepare students for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school purposely designed class names based on New York-based colleges and universities, such as Baruch, Medgar Evers, Syracuse, New Paltz and NY Institute of Technology. The principal said this was done “so that students would become familiar with institutions of higher education that they might choose to attend in the future that are close to where our school is located.” Students talked about writing resumes in English language arts (ELA) and essays about “Why seventh graders deserve a spot in Class 801.”
- The school is working with families to help them become more engaged with their students’ academics at home and how they are developing socially and emotionally. Workshops for parents have been conducted on the Common Core, instructional shifts, and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) assessments. Parents talked about the school’s great communication about upcoming events via phone, letters, and emails. Teachers call parents at home to give good news. “Jaden’s doing well...tell him to keep up the good work,” said a teacher on a call. As a part of the school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) initiative, students earn points and PowerBucks for academic achievement and for such behaviors as wearing their uniforms each day and being polite. These PowerBucks can be used to gain entry into special school events and activities.
- The school’s instructional focus is, “Through the use of data and effective planning practices, teachers will develop questions and student discussion opportunities that check and deepen student understanding to establish a shift from teacher-centered to a more student-centered culture for learning.” “We’ve been frontloading professional development this year so that next year we’ll have teachers engaged in smarter work,” said the principal. These professional development sessions have been delivered as “Lunch and Learn” opportunities and talks about professional books.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student participation.

### Impact

The inconsistent provision of multiple entry points into the curricula results in uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products, including the work of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

### Supporting Evidence

- Sixth-grade students worked in groups in a math class focused on learning statistics and probability. Students analyzed data about the number of consecutive jumps in a jump rope contest to find the five statistical values needed to create a box-and-whisker plot. The lesson plan incorporated different entry points for students to demonstrate mastery of his or her ability to analyze a box plot, however there was no visible group identification by color leading to some confusion. The groups were too large and students did not have specific roles to play. As a result, not every student actively participated. Students were given both oral and written objectives to address different learning styles. To support ELLs, workbook vocabulary was written and defined in both English and Spanish, and visual images were included. The teacher had a strong knowledge of content. Groups chose team leaders to present their findings to the rest of the class, however students were dismayed when the teacher ended the lesson after one group presented because they ran out of time.
- The essential question in a grade 7 math class was “How do we solve for unknown angles in diagrams involving complementary and supplementary angles?” Teacher: “Look at the angles on the board. Are they supplementary angles?” Student 1: “Yes, because they don’t have to always be a right angle.” Teacher: “What’s the difference between these two angles?” Student 2: “The second is not an adjacent angle.” Teacher: “Why?” Student 2: “They don’t share the same line.” The principal said that she is working with this teacher on questioning and discussion techniques. “We’re working on ‘wait time.’ Some teachers are uncomfortable with the silence.”
- An eighth grade social studies class focused on the following essential question: “How did Hitler use propaganda to sway the German people from Democratic government to a Fascist government?” Teacher: “How does the military use propaganda?” Student 1: “They use posters, commercials, buttons, pins, and banners to try to get you to join.” Teacher: “When I was in high school, they had big guys come in from the military. What were they trying to do?” Student 2: “Persuade.” The teacher showed the class a poster of Hitler entitled, “Long live Germany.” Teacher: “What do you see that the artist did in this poster?” Student 3: “The sun is shining on people and the army is standing behind them. It looks like millions.” Student 2: “There’s also a flag and an angel in the picture.” The teacher called upon the same students.

## Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
--------------------	----------------	---------	------------

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

### Impact

Purposeful decisions build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. The emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects promotes student learning, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school currently uses *Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3)*. The principal has been providing professional development on the *Singapore Math* program, a program she used at her former school, with the hope that teachers will begin to feel comfortable supplementing *CMP3* with *Singapore Math*. “My teachers have grown in that they feel they have autonomy and don’t have to follow the order in which they facilitate the curriculum or the text they use, based on the needs of the students,” said the principal. The math department is currently previewing Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s *GO Math!* program as a possible supplement to *CMP3*.
- The school is implementing Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s *Common Core CODE X™* program, which teachers supplement with news articles from *Newsela* and content from *ReadWorks.org* to build reading comprehension. The school’s curriculum reflects a balance of informational and literacy texts. The literacy department is planning to incorporate *Expeditionary Learning* units to address weaknesses identified in the *CODE X* program.
- A student talked about a unit project on ecosystems in science and the topic he chose to write about: “From a list of options, I chose to explain why the ecosystem was important to the environment.” Another student talked about his paper about why the Eiffel Tower needs to be preserved, which was part of a unit on the seven World Wonders: “I put a lot of effort in it.”

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. Common assessments are used to determine progress towards goals across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

Actionable feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. The results of common assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- “Currently we’re working on structures for holding all students accountable for engaging in high-level discussion and thinking,” said the principal. The school uses benchmark assessments and receives item analyses from *SchoolNet* to track student progress. School administration is working with teachers to develop their practices in formative assessment, ensuring that teachers are checking for understanding so that adjustments to curriculum can be more granular and frequent. The school uses Jupiter Grades, an online grading system through which parents and students can see current grades, missing assignments, check homework, class attendance/lateness, and behavior. Teachers use exit tickets and written student reflections to check for student understanding at the end of a lesson. Teachers maintain data binders with sheets entitled “Assessment Analysis and Instructional Plans.”
- Feedback is provided to students in the form of “glows” (strengths) and “grows” (areas for improvement or next steps). Asked about the use of rubrics, students responded: Student 1: “My teacher first explains how to get a 3 or 4. He helps us to understand.” Student 2: “Our teacher brings us step-by-step through the rubric and compares writing an essay to the rubric.” Student 3: “A teacher shouldn’t have to tell you if it’s right. You should be able to look at the rubric to know that.” Student 4: “We peer edit sometimes in ELA using a rubric. We also grade each other sometimes.” Showing that assessment can be fun, teachers engage students for about three weeks in every class in *Jeopardy!*® games for points to show what they learned in their *Word Generation* program. A student talked about an essay entitled “Condila,” about a tribal leader who protects his family unit: “It took me a short time to write because I came in late, but I got 100%. I used a lot of *Word Generation* vocabulary. It shows I’m improving. My teacher said he was proud of me.” Another student told about his paper on the Great Depression, in which he read, analyzed, compared and contrasted text about Franklin Roosevelt: “I was proud because I was the exemplar.”
- Following a mini-lesson and guided practice in constructing box-and-whisker plots, a math teacher checked for understanding with the following “Stop & Jot” activity: “Students will be asked to solve a problem to individually assess their ability to perform the skills learned. The teacher used this information to break students into color-coded groups based on their responses. For his three sixth grade classes, the teacher constructed a mixed-group seating chart based on the results of the fall math benchmark levels 1 through 4.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	---	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity.

### Impact

There has been improved teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers defined inquiry as: “Investigating to draw conclusions and make things better.” Teacher teams analyze benchmark assessment data as well as student work. Looking at data is an important part of the school’s teacher teams and a school-wide focus is on expanding the use of data from item analyses and tracking monthly assessments.
- Three teachers comprise the social studies inquiry team, which meets monthly in addition to their weekly school-wide professional learning communities. The technology teacher serves as the meeting facilitator. They have been looking at whole classes rather than tracking a targeted group of students. The agenda for today’s meeting included the following objective: “We will be able to plan a week of instruction based on the Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) assessment by examining data to differentiate by skill.” Teachers discussed the mid-term MoSL, on which some classes showed growth. The team focused on a rubric with the following seven traits: Trait 1: Document Analysis, Trait 2: Document Integration, Trait 3: Argument, Trait 4: Claims and Counterclaims, Trait 5: Reasoning and Use of Evidence, Trait 6: Organization, and Trait 7: Historical Concepts and Information. The team discussed time management of students on document-based questions (DBQs). In grading the tests, teachers noticed that students struggled with text-based evidence and were giving opinions rather than evidence. They also had difficulty with arguments as well as comparing and contrasting events. Sixth-graders had trouble with the concept of “tone.” The team agreed that they needed to focus on high leverage areas given that the MoSL testing in all major content areas was scheduled to take place in one week.
- The technology teacher serves as a fellow with the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI). Five of the school’s teachers were identified for the NYC Department of Education’s teacher leadership program. “Through frequent observation and staff interest, I discovered who my leaders were in the building and took advantage of their strengths to turnkey professional development,” said the principal.