



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Kappa III

12X316

**2055 Mapes Avenue
Bronx, NY 10460**

Principal: Elisa Alvarez

Date of review: January 14, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Rafaela Espinal

The School Context

Kappa III is a middle school with 348 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 31% Black, 64% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 9% 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 2013-2014 was 94.3%.

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	Focus	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	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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
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Findings

Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide feedback and guidance to ensure that students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations and successfully partner with families to support student progress toward those expectations.

Impact

School leaders embed high expectations in all aspects of school culture, focusing on college and career readiness and teachers, students and families are supported to achieve those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school orchestrates ongoing events and creates multiple opportunities to partner with and engage families in learning, fostering their participation in a culture of high expectations connected to college and career readiness. Every course welcomes the parents/guardian to our Meet and Greet Evening at which time they receive a syllabus. Family workshops are facilitated to help for their child attending college. Motivational speakers share in these workshops. Workshops for parents to clarify the changes and implications of the Common Core Learning Standards are planned with the school leaders, parent coordinators, and the parent leadership.
- The school provides ongoing, clear lines of verbal and written communication through online progress reports, handbooks, as well as parent/teacher conferences, and workshops, to deepen stakeholders' understanding of college and career readiness expectations for their children and empower them to help support their children in meeting or exceeding those expectations. Parents shared that they receive Weekly Chronicles with academic highlights and events via backpacks and email. Standards of Excellence are sent out six weeks prior to every report card as a progress reports. Kappa III has four report card marking periods as opposed to three. They use Pupil Path for daily internet communication with parents as well as phone calls to celebrate the achievements and alert the parents with concerns.
- Advisory sessions are held every Friday and articles are used to discuss the point of interest in the life of a young teen. The guidance counselor interviews all students in grade 6 outside the classroom door in "Minute Meetings" as a means of getting to know each student and to help them transition into middle school.
- Staff members have instituted a culture for learning that provides all students with effective feedback including clear next steps as evidenced in student work products and as expressed by students. The school-wide note taking system for students builds student accountability for learning goals and expectations to prepare them for their next grade while ensuring their ownership of the learning process. An English language learner (ELL) stated, "We have SMART goals and that means that they are Specific Measurable Actionable...we keep them in a folder..." The student added, "We have choices and if we don't do well on a test we can revise it and get half a grade point."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core, however the strategic integration of the instructional shifts is not yet consistent across all grades and subjects. Teachers plan and refine curriculum using student work and data, however there is not yet a system in place to ensure supports for all students, including high achievers.

Impact

ELLs and students with disabilities have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged in tasks that emphasize rigorous habits across classrooms, promoting post-secondary readiness. However, there are missed opportunities to consistently engage all groups in a coherent curricula and challenging tasks and activities.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula and academic tasks are designed to engage students, advance them through the content, and assess their understanding as evidenced by their work products. Teachers participate in collaborative inquiry work to address students' needs connected to student achievement. Refinement of academic tasks is addressed by looking at student work using the Teacher Incentive Protocol. The protocol guides the professors to address misconceptions and sets the expectation for re-teaching of the skills to attain a passing level of mastery. Rigor is measured by criteria fulfilled on a common rubric that connect to the Common Core. However, tasks are not yet consistently refined to ensure the engagement of the highest achieving students. For example, after reviewing student work products teachers focused on the areas that needed to be modeled more explicitly for students that did not meet unit benchmarks, while adjustments for higher achieving students were not made.
- School leaders and teachers provide a data-based rationale that identifies areas of growth or achievement gaps for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities and other subgroups, and were able to explain how curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined accordingly so that all students have access to curricula as evidenced in the electronic documents presented and the revisions made to academic intervention programs. For example, an early morning period was added as a Response to Intervention program to address the gaps identified for groups of students using an adjusted curriculum.
- Curricula, across and within grade levels, are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts to promote college and career readiness for all students. Both teachers and students, including ELLs, were able to explain how daily lessons are modified to include the instructional shifts. However, coherence was not yet consistently evident across all grades and subject areas. For example, students in the ELA English as a second language classroom were able to explain how in the unit they support their ideas with text-based evidence using vocabulary charts, graphic organizers and close reading strategies, but they did not provide examples of strategic integration in other subjects.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn informed by discussions at the team and school level. Across the vast majority of classrooms student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

Impact

Teacher pedagogy is developed and informed by the instructional shifts and the Danielson Framework for Teaching and emphasize a shared belief to provide students with multiple entry points into the curricula, ensuring that all students are engaged in challenging tasks and are producing meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Across a preponderance of classrooms, teacher practices consistently reflect and support school-wide beliefs about how students learn best. Teachers and administrators can articulate how those beliefs are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to curricula, and shaped by teacher team and faculty input. Peer Instructional Coaches conduct intervisitations throughout the year. The coaches use low inference notes and provide feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework of Teaching.
- There was evidence of student ownership and participation across all classrooms. Discussions and activities promoted high levels of understanding. There were opportunities for students to work in small groups and participate at different levels. Instruction was aligned to the curriculum and lessons observed started by establishing a point of clear understanding and transitioned into more challenging activities to promote student thinking and participation.
- Teachers in all content areas engage their students in a school-wide initiative to improve writing skills across the curricula. Shared practices of implementation such as citing textual evidence was the tool used for evaluation in the vast majority of classrooms. This is informed by the focus on this instructional shift and discussions at the school and team levels reflected that belief and expectation. All student work products contained the Black Board Configuration, which is a consistent way students record their learning for the day, and work products displayed demonstrated writing across the curriculum where students cited text evidence.
- Active participation, small group instruction, and student discussions that reflect high levels of student thinking and participation are shared beliefs expressed by students, teachers and school leaders. Teachers have received feedback and professional development based on the Danielson Framework for teaching on the school-wide focus on questioning and discussion techniques to develop their skills in planning high level questions aligned to each unit and on protocols for student ownership and participation. Small and whole group discussions were observed across classrooms. These included high level discussions on mapping coordinate planes, inferences made from propaganda, methods of indirect characterization, analyzing model argumentative essays, and the effects of radiation.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and provide meaningful feedback to students. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Impact

Across all classrooms, teachers' assessment practices measure student progress through the use of rubrics, conferences, checks for understanding and common assessments to adjust instruction to meet the needs of all students, leading to increased achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use ongoing assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels. For example, as a direct result of cumulative data, teachers created small group instruction that focuses on targeted skills. This takes place during an additional period that was created prior our first period class as a Response to Intervention. The data reviewed is kept electronically and is used school-wide and analyzed in grade and department teams. Teachers, school leaders and students were able to describe assessment practices and demonstrate evidence of the practice through student work products.
- Teachers use and create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. These include New York State Common Core State Standards aligned summative assessments, Performance Series, three Writing Benchmarks with rubrics aligned to Common Core, Degrees of Reading Power (to measure vocabulary and fluency), Spotlight on literacy, and I-Ready assessments to measure and monitor student gains. Through these varied assessments 156 students were identified and an F-Status intervention teacher was hired to provide targeted support towards mastery of the skills identified. The students are also tracked on an online grading system reviewed with the school leaders.
- During common planning session departments develop pre and post unit assessments, establish benchmark exams to determine student's levels of performance and grouping. These help teachers have a clear portrait of student mastery and also provide meaningful feedback for teachers and students. Teachers enter day to day data into Skedula, an on line grading system that is accessible to students and parents.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment. The school has designed a toolkit of strategies to check for understanding and engage students in self-assessment. These include stop/traffic lights (observed in a variety of forms: rings, cubes, charts with clips, etc.), peer feedback, rubrics (school-wide writing rubric and unit specific rubrics), peer assessment practices (glows and grows, student leader), feedback on post it notes with next steps, conferring, exit slips, and questions designed to assess student learning. The lesson plans reflect planning for assessments that were observed during the lessons and in student to student interactions.

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

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership that positively affect student learning across the school.

Impact

Teachers are engaged in professional collaborations building their capacity in decisions relating to curriculum development, the integration of the Common Core, and analyzing student work resulting in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly with their colleagues to discuss and develop effective instruction aligned to the Common Core. Common planning sessions are embedded in the schedule and teachers meet as departments, develop pre and post unit assessments, establish benchmark exams to determine student’s levels of performance and groupings. “We don’t adjust the Common Core aligned tasks, we adjust our approach to meet the needs of the learner so they get to the same end point,” a teacher stated. Another teacher added, “We use graphic organizers, modeling, change our pacing, incorporate audiovisuals, and adjust the grouping (individual, partners, subgroups).”
- Mini inquiry research teams were established to focus on selected topics of interest to determine if the strategy will become part of the KAPPA III Essential Features of Academics. For example, when creating checks for understanding the team decided that teachers had to create opportunities for students to self-assess throughout the lesson and decided on using a school-wide use of traffic/stop light strategy.
- Grade/content team meetings focus primarily on looking at student work to determine the level of academic rigor and identify areas of skills in need of intervention. Based on the findings of the data and teacher feedback the teams determine which strategies to implement across grade and content for a unified approach. A tool kit of strategies is usually created resulting in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students.
- Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. Grade and content teams examine qualities of students’ work and current task requirements to inform instruction and targeted intervention. Teachers collect student work from a variety of data sources in all subject areas. During the teacher team meeting a group of teachers across grades in ELA analyzed student writing and identified the gaps in the learning in the unit and identified the adjustments needed for the upcoming lessons. Adjustments included using other student writing as mentor texts to demonstrate mastery based on the school-wide writing rubric, re-teaching using relevant textual evidence, and revisiting point of view. The agenda was provided and minutes of previous meeting for other teams were available.