



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The School for Inquiry and Social Justice

Middle School X337

**1025 Morrison Avenue
Bronx
NY 10472**

Principal: Andrea Cyprys

**Date of review: February 10, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Socorro Diaz**

The School Context

The School for Inquiry and Social Justice is a middle school with 394 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 36% Black, 63% Hispanic, 0% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teacher practices align with the curricula and reflect and support school wide beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

Impact

Teacher practices reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. All learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills that yield high quality student work.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers believe in student-centered instruction and student accountability in support of their own learning and behavior. A pedagogical shift toward increased effective practices that focus on strengthening writing and reading instruction and fosters student independence is a team initiative that includes pedagogical best practices informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. An emphasis on the quality of questioning and discussion techniques has yielded growth in student ownership and depth in student discussions. The school's instructional focus incorporates the Danielson Framework to promote higher order thinking questions and discussion, thereby increasing the level of cognitive demand required of students during learning activities.
- Students across classrooms produce work and engage in discussions that reflect critical thinking, creativity, innovation and problem solving, as well as student ownership of the learning process. Checklists and self-assessment forms used by students prior to submitting their work demonstrate student accountability for their own learning. In a grade 7 social studies class, students used a set of reflective questions to self-assess, "What could have made today's work more challenging?", "Is assessing the work of your peers relevant or useful to your learning?" In a grade 6 math class, students worked in partnerships using their class notes to review the definitions of improper fractions and mixed numbers using their own words.
- During the vast majority of classroom visits, students dialogue using academic vocabulary and evidenced-based accountable talk while working within their groups. Teachers grouped students purposefully across all classrooms. When asked, the vast majority of students were able to articulate what they were learning and why it was important. In a grade 6 literacy class students were learning about how technology has played an expansive or limited role in education in the 21st century. Teachers asked students in their flexible groups to describe the physical learning environment at the Waldorf School based upon the text. The teacher asked other student groups to respond to, "How does the author, Matt Richtel, defend his claim that computers and school do not mix?" A third group agreed or disagreed with Alan Eagle's claim: "The idea that an app on an iPad can better teach my kids or do arithmetic, that's ridiculous." One last group discussed why the Waldorf School is a unique school for the 21st century. Before completing the group work students had an opportunity to talk at their tables and confer with their classmates to produce a single detailed answer.

Area of Focus

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

School leaders and teachers have built a culture of professional collaboration in which they share insights relative to the coherence of teacher pedagogy fostering improvement of outcomes for all learners. The school embeds distributed teacher leadership and their effective work improves learning across all areas of the school.

Impact

School-wide instructional coherence is evident throughout all classrooms and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect teaching and learning across the school resulting in increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts by working collaboratively during common planning periods and professional development sessions. These practices help ensure that Common Core implementation is consistent across the entire school. Teachers plan their lessons using the Pearson Education’s Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and the Danielson Framework to develop a common language and a shared set of practices across grades and subject areas to determine next steps and create multiple entry points for whole class, small groups, and individualized instruction. Currently, all teacher teams engage in inquiry work. Moving forward, the school’s focus is the revision of their inquiry structures to study specific grade and content and focus more upon reviewing and studying student work and assessment data.
- A strong professional learning community exists at the school. Teachers regularly engage in professional collaborations that support instructional goals, strengthen teacher capacity and support a positive culture of trust. A teacher said, “We have a strong culture of collaboration at our school. Our school is celebrated as a team.” During weekly professional learning time and scheduled content area team meetings, teachers engage in analyzing student work, aligning lessons and units with grade level cohorts, sharing instructional practices and ensuring that all instructional tasks align with the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. These practices enable teachers to be responsive to student needs while planning for instruction.
- Teacher leaders, demonstration teachers, and peer instructional coaches, who represent each grade and content, meet weekly with the instructional cabinet to discuss professional development and teacher practice. School administration and staff collaboratively plan and facilitate professional development, school-learning walks, articulation events, parent-teacher workshops and all other school-wide events. During two observed teacher team meetings, teachers articulated that they feel empowered to have input on decisions toward the development of instructional resources across grades and that their leadership is valued. For example, the inter-visitation/mentoring team works collaboratively with the administrative team in developing support plans for the newest staff. New teachers volunteer for scheduled classroom visits with experienced teachers and debrief using the Reciprocal Peer Mentoring Protocol to discuss and reflect on their observations.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teachers emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills in the school's curricula and academic tasks, and embed them in a coherent way across grades and subjects. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

All students have access to the curricula through rigorous tasks that are cognitively engaging and require learners to demonstrate their thinking at a high level.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use the SIOP to develop, plan and execute their lessons. All teachers utilize this instructional model to increase comprehension of content, acquisition of language, and vocabulary retention, especially for English language learners, students with disabilities and struggling readers and writers. In addition, teachers also use the Danielson Framework to develop a common language and a common set of practices across grades and subject areas. Teachers receive ongoing professional development focused on creating units of study and lesson plans addressing language and content objectives and building on students' background knowledge. To make the curriculum accessible, teachers incorporate visuals and use assistive technology.
- Teachers documented revisions to the Expeditionary Learning and Glencoe Mathematics programs in binders during a curriculum mapping process conducted in their grade and content meetings. An outcome of this process was a focus on deepening student understanding of the content and instructional tasks in order to increase comprehension and engagement. Across all grades, students complete units in nonfiction, which include informational, narrative and argumentative texts to facilitate the acquisition of Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers design units to increase text and task complexity while increasing vocabulary and content area knowledge so that students are able to complete tasks that require greater depth of critical thought. These curricular units engage students in creative, rigorous, and reflective inquiry by incorporating questioning, problem solving, reflection, and real-world connections across grades and content areas.
- During a team meeting, teachers used their knowledge of students' preferred learning styles as well as samples of recent student work to modify a literacy unit by purposefully grouping students and ensuring leveled texts would be available. In addition, the principal provided examples of units in math, science and social studies that also implemented modifications based on student work and assessment data. A review of a grade 8 math unit focusing on geometry transformations revealed adjustments to re-teach reflections on two-dimensional figures using coordinates.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The great majority of teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Students are aware of their next learning and instructional steps based upon actionable feedback provided by their teachers as well as other students. Teachers make effective curricular and instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Department teams develop assessments aligned to the curricula, and use these assessments to inform teachers of student progress and performance. For example, the literacy department analyzes assessments from Expeditionary Learning and Curriculum Associates' Ready to gauge students' mastery of clusters of standards covered during each unit. This data informs the Academic Intervention Services/Response to Intervention (AIS/RTI) instructional groups. The AIS teacher pulls out students once to twice per week to provide targeted instruction using appropriately leveled texts and questioning techniques. AIS cycles last for approximately six weeks. At the end of each cycle, teacher teams meet to begin a new data analysis cycle and redesign groups, curriculum, and scaffolds.
- Curricula-aligned assessment practices provide actionable feedback. For example, all literacy teachers used the New York State two and four point writing rubrics to create student friendly checklists for all tasks that require writing from document sources. Students refer to these checklists during self and peer assessments and they answer four questions as a reflection practice: "What skills from this unit do you think you are strongest at?", "What do you think helped you learn this?", "What skills from this unit do you think you need to work on?", "Why do you think these skills are difficult for you?"
- Across subject areas, rubrics align with the school's grading policy and provide students with feedback that includes areas of strength as well as areas to improve upon. Students were observed using rubrics to self and peer assess, and to track their progress. In a grade 7 math class students were using a four-point assessment rubric to evaluate their proficiency and understanding on a midterm exam.
- Teachers used a number of ongoing checks for understanding such as pre-planned questioning, problem solving rubrics, white boards, exit tickets, and strategic grouping to support students' academic skills and to meet their learning needs. In a science class students were discussing prior learning of the definition of mitosis to help make connections to new learning. In a grade 6 English language arts class, the teacher grouped students based on their reading proficiency levels and asked them to identify how textual evidence supports the author's point of view. Each group received an exemplar to annotate their comparisons using a Group Text Analysis Protocol.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

A school-wide culture for learning exists that consistently supports high expectations among staff and students. The school effectively communicates these expectations and supports professionalism, mutual accountability, instructional supports, and college and career readiness.

Impact

The school has developed a culture of mutual accountability and staff takes ownership on improving their own practice and creating true partnerships with parents that result in increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school communicates high expectations to staff, supported by training and including a system of accountability. During faculty conferences, administration informs teachers of supervisory assignments, lesson plans expectations, training opportunities, academic and behavior practices, team meetings and program schedule changes. School leaders discuss expectations and goals for the year, observations options, and Measures of Student Learning during the initial planning and end of year conferences with teachers. Teachers have multiple opportunities for professional development to support student independence. The entire staff participated in professional development over the summer offered by Datacation to help them interpret complex student data to better inform and support instruction, professional development, curriculum planning, accountability and policy.
- Staff communicates and supports high expectations to students. For example, teachers craft meaningful feedback to students that aligns with student-friendly rubrics. The student friendly rubrics and actionable feedback accompany student work displayed in hallways. On a “Bernie Krause Essay Task”, a teacher feedback was addressed as, “strengths: finding relevant evidence; summarizing a text, determining theme by identifying characters, setting and plot” and “next steps: need to analyze character traits through dialogue and plot.” Teachers also celebrate student strengths in academic learning and support individual student’s needs as learners. Teachers expose students to different careers and share their own career experiences with students to promote personal behaviors like persistence, good work habits, responsibility, organizational skills, collaboration and self-regulation.
- Parents spoke about how teachers not only communicate with them on a regular basis using the school’s website but that they also regularly provide them with strategies to support their children when they are working at home. Several parents specifically spoke of how workshops such as “Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol” have been extremely helpful in understanding the framework used by teachers in their classrooms to engage students in learning. The school’s parent coordinator works collaboratively with the parent association to ensure that all parent workshops meet the needs of the community.
- Department leaders and the administration collaboratively created a detailed faculty handbook, which clearly outlines all staff professional responsibilities and expectations. They regularly review it throughout the school year to ensure familiarity and relevance.