



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

School of Diplomacy

Middle School X370

**3710 Barnes Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Sean Licata

**Date of review: March 18, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

School of Diplomacy is a middle school with 234 students from grades 6 through 8. The school population comprises 54% Black, 35% Hispanic, 4% White, 5% Asian, and 2% other students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 31% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86.4%.

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	Celebration	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	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	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

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

Impact

The school has made purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs).

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses curriculum maps and modules from the state's EngageNY website for mathematics, which is supplemented with content from McGraw-Hill's *IMPACT Mathematics* and Pearson's *Connected Math Project 3 (CMP3)*. "We were initially using CMP3 but needed to identify other sources based on where our students are," said a teacher. Teachers said that they are currently using EngageNY content as they focus on revisiting priority standards and the clusters of content most represented on the state's test.
- Scholastic's *Common Core CODE X™* program is used for English language arts (ELA). Teachers are emphasizing writing from multiple sources within their literacy instruction. Nonfiction content is accessed from the *NEWSELA*, which enables an entire class to read the same text at different reading levels. *Word Generation* is used in all core disciplines throughout the school to support academic vocabulary. "We've noticed that deciphering word problems is a challenge and we're discussing how to attack this," said a teacher. "We are also trying to infuse literacy into math."
- The school has recently partnered with the New York Hall of Science to develop interactive science units of study.
- Most unit plans for grades 6 and 7 have been inputted onto Rubicon's Atlas web-based curriculum management platform. "I've counted how many teachable days and plan units there are," said a teacher. "It's a continuous work in progress."
- "Rigor is not necessarily difficult, but it's how expansive students' knowledge is," said a teacher. "It leads to the advancement of students. In grade 8, there's a focus on linear relationships. However, unit rate needs to be mastered at grade 7 before slope and functions at grade 8. Students who have mastered linear function would be taught quadratic relationships, which is a 9th grade topic." Another teacher said, "It's about having students take material and translate it into everyday life. We're always trying to bridge the real world. In my lessons, I say to students that this is a college topic."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

There is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products, including the work of ELLs and SWDs.

Supporting Evidence

- The stated aim of a science lesson for 6th grade SWDs was “How can we analyze the similarities and differences from a text to help us determine the central idea of the reading?” Students read an article entitled “Strong Solar Storm Reaching Earth” about the Hubble Telescope capturing a rare triple-moon conjunction.” Students were tasked with comparing and contrasting phenomenon on the Planet Mars with the Planet Earth, using comparison and contrast key words. As students were called upon, the teacher charted the similarities and differences: Student 1: “Both events are rare and don’t happen on a daily basis.” Student 2: “One was a picture with a camera and the other was seen through a telescope. The teacher posed the question, “Why do scientists use the skill compare and contrast to further predict an outcome?” The teacher continued to talk without providing wait time for students to respond to the question, and posed an additional question: “What do you think was the main idea of the reading?” The principal stated that the teacher is working on strengthening her questioning skills using Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels.
- In a 7th grade English as a Second Language class, students were tasked with providing reasons why two main characters in two different texts decided to help their communities. The *Common Core CODE X* texts were entitled “Ryan and Jimmy and the well in Africa that brought them together,” and “Marina Silva: Defending rainforest communities in Brazil.” Students were grouped by English language comprehension levels—one group of students had very limited language skills and the other group of students had more advanced language skills. Student groups engaged in accountable talk using textual evidence, and were provided graphic organizers to compare and contrast the texts. Teacher: “Why was she there? She was a powerful senator; why did she care?” Student 1: “Because she came from there.” Teacher: “If you were to get a message, what would it be?” Student 2: “The message is no matter where you came from, if you have a goal you can be successful.” Student 3: “With determination, we can complete anything.”
- A social studies teacher of a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade self-contained bridge class planned to have students write a letter protesting the women’s suffrage movement to highlight how inequality affects people’s lives and compare and contrast women’s rights before and now. Students were grouped according to learning style, with three learners identified as “auditory” and four learners identified as “linguistic.” During role-play as a male professor in 1919 at Oxford University, the teacher stated, “Women are fragile and delicate, women don’t belong in academia, and women are not intelligent and need to be taken care of.” Teacher: “Who can list a reason why women should not have equal rights in 1919?” Student: “Men think that women are not as smart as men. Women should not be teaching because they should be home doing housework while men work.” The principal stated that the teacher is being supported in designing coherent instruction.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to determine both student progress and student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers use the results of common assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction and make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal explained that the process that the school framed is first educate our teachers—provide them with the data and hold professional development sessions. To build an understanding of data among teachers, the school conducted professional development on the item analysis received from the city. The school's professional development focus is on looking at assessment, the triangulation of data, assessing what do kids need, and grouping kids around what they need to know and can do. The school identified its lowest third of student performance data and found that the 8th grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class has the highest concentration of the lowest third students. On the flip side, the school also found that they have a 7th grade class that has no students in the lowest third. "Ownership speaks to choice and peer assessment. When students take pride in their learning, you take ownership in your learning," said the principal. "I've seen where students are presenting pieces to their peers and are picking the topic, choosing the data, and owning what they're speaking about. Pride is the major element."
- The school uses *JupiterGrades*, an online grading system that allows students and their parents to have access to their grades. Students reported that they use rubrics to guide their work and for self- and peer-assessment. Student portfolios contain reading responses, monthly writing pieces, articles, reading inventories, vocabulary assessments and unit tests, and reflections. The school uses RALLY's *NY ELA Rehearsal Plus program*, which provides practice questions aligned to the state's ELA test.
- "When I assess kids, I use different processes for them," said a teacher. "For example in geometry, if the task is to use polyhedral nets to determine surface area (which is the sum of all the areas of all the shapes that cover the surface of an object), then I give them options to use whiteboards or manipulatives, scissors and tape, or hands." Teachers use such quick formative assessments as "thumbs up/down" and exit slips. For example, the following exit slip question was displayed on chart paper in a grade 7 ELA class: "How to build our vocabulary using the *Word Generation* words in the correct context?" Students wrote their responses on individual index cards, which were displayed below the question. Responses ranged from, "by using the vocabulary in our everyday writing," "by absorbing the definition and implementing them in my sentences," "by using the words in graphic organizers," and "by reading books that are nonfiction."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Teacher teams and staff have established a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

The school has a system of accountability for high expectations. Detailed feedback and supports are in place to prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s mission statement reads, “The School of Diplomacy is committed to preparing for college and career. College and career readiness entails students being ready to enroll, persist, and succeed in college, postsecondary training opportunities, and gain entry into meaningful careers.” “Next year, 8th grade students in our honors classes will take the Living Environment and Algebra I Regents,” said the principal. “Seventh graders will have honors classes to accelerate them for the 8th grade and high school. We’re also trying to identify our incoming 6th graders so we can begin planning for their needs.” The school participates in the city’s Middle School Quality Initiative, which provides professional development to help teachers prepare students for success in college and career.
- Students in many classes have completed learning style inventories. One student wrote: “I am an auditory learner. I want my teacher to explain more about the work.” Another student wrote, “I am a visual learner. I need to see how things are being taught to me and what they look like.” The school has partnered with a community-based organization, Creative Connections, who engage with students on college and career. According to its website (www.creativec.org), this organization “helps students make connections between academic excellence and real world through structured hands-on and project-based activities.” There’s also an afterschool program that focuses on financial literacy.
- When asked “what would make this school even better than it is,” Parent 1 responded, “It they had a class to teach us what they’re teaching the kids. I would love to be able to help my son more if I understood.” Parent 2: “If there was no scanning, which can be traumatizing. It’s like going into a courtroom. You don’t know the experience of each student. Parent 1: It can be annoying but gradually you get used to it. If my son is running late, that can slow down the process further.” On the topic of the Common Core, Parent 1 stated: “They say it gives kids more options to learn, but it’s more difficult. My son has an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and he struggles. His issue is focusing. We’ve gone on websites like Khan Academy, YouTube, and *i-Ready*® together.” Parent 2: “I grew up in another country. I try to teach him the way I understand...as long as you arrive at the right answer.” When asked how they know how well their child is doing in school, parents responded as follows: Parent 1: “I stay in contact with his teachers. They give you their cell numbers. I speak with mainly four teachers—science, social studies, ELA, and math. They’re very responsive; they want only the best for your kid.” Regarding their child’s goals, Parent 1 said: “My son wants to be a choreographer but he struggles. We’re at a point with medication now. The principal brought in drumming afterschool and kids are engaged in boxing, martial arts, and cadets. And, that’s not including the Bell program. There are more than enough outlets. My son’s great at music and art; he loves projects. We’ve looked at the high school criteria but haven’t visited any.” Parent 2: “My son came home with an application for the Summer Youth Employment Program.”

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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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 in this school.

Impact

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

Supporting Evidence

- A team comprised of ELA general education and special education teachers meets 4 of 5 days each week. The teachers have in common teaching of grade 7 classes. The agenda is focused on brainstorming the possible reasons for students choosing particular answers on a grade 7 timed reading assessment passage about Madam C. J. Walker. The team agreed that citing textual evidence from this passage, as well as drawing inferences is the difficulty students are experiencing. "We use these passages to help reteach," said a teacher. Focused on one particular question, the team engaged in a dialogue about what students would need to understand about what Madam C. J. Walker did for African-American women. During their analysis of one student's responses, teachers commented that the student's answers were not relevant and that the student needs to know the difference between main idea and supporting details. The teachers shared their thoughts about the general reasons for student struggles with text, including students not going back to a particular text to find the evidence; feeling pressured and stressed due to the limited time provided, particularly those students who read slower than others; and students who have difficulty with questions that have two or three parts and are neglecting to answer all parts.
- Teachers said that they were individually tracking the academic progress of various students. Two teachers talked about the reading assessment results of two grade 7 students they were tracking. Another teacher said, "I teach a higher-level class than they do. The students I'm teaching are not in this assessment because I'm tracking 8th graders." Another teacher said, "I'm tracking a special education student and this data will help me when I go to my class and look at the student's work." Another teacher said, "I gave my students a reading strategy exam on March 13th and they did poorly."
- Team members have informal leadership roles that rotate on teams so that everyone contributes to team discussions and decisions.