



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Hunts Point Middle School**

**Middle School X424**

**730 Bryant Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10474**

**Principal: Sonya Johnson**

**Date of review: November 17, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Beverly Ffolkes-Bryant, Ed.D.**

## The School Context

Hunts Point Middle School is a middle school with 381 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 29% Black, 70% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.2%.

## 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>Focus</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</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>Additional Findings</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Administrators consistently communicate high expectations for achievement and success by students and are developing systems by which staff can be trained and held accountable for such goals and parents can be given feedback regarding student progress toward those goals.

### Impact

A culture of learning is in the process of being developed in the school, and the school is developing supports for families to help meet those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- High expectations for teaching and learning are communicated via the principal's weekly letters to staff, as well as the Staff Handbook. The school uses Google Docs to share these letters as well as to store Inquiry Team minutes and agendas and anything else that is documented in the building, like unit plans, written materials from workshops, etc. In addition, there is an administrator who participates in all inquiry team meetings, ensuring a shared commitment to the school's expectations and goals. This was evident at the "Team ELATED" team meeting when the Principal asked the chairs of each department if the activity they were doing in assessing the Unit 1 test from the Scholastic Codex program and looking at the particular standards it addresses will be applicable for their subject areas.
- Students are informed of the school's expectations through the Student/Guardian Handbook, which is also translated in Spanish at the beginning of the school year as well as the *Scholar's Responsibilities* document. Parents sign the Scholar's Pledge, where parents pledge to send the child to school daily, keep in contact with the school, support the school's dress code, limit television and video time and promise to be an active participant in their child's learning process, as well as the Student Contract which has to be read and signed by both parent and student. In addition, this year the principal purchased the *Six Pillars of Character* student planner, which provides a daily focus on the high expectations of the school. As a result, there is a consistent message to families and students on expectations and their role in assisting their children to advance.
- Parents at the parent meeting expressed how satisfied they are with the way the school leaders communicate their expectations, guiding their children toward a path for college and career readiness. They talked about how they have been trained in using Pupil Path, an online information system for parents and students. Parents get to see their children's attendance, class schedule as well as their assignments and due dates as well as other important information. Parents can access their child's information at any time. The Principal also sends parents to various workshops regarding the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards at the network office. They also talked about the monthly parent calendar that invites parents to workshops and events, such as Muffins for Mothers, Coffee Day and Honor Roll Day. At all of these events, the school's expectations are reinforced. As a result, there is an increasingly consistent message to families on expectations and their role in assisting their children to advance.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Underdeveloped**

### Findings

The school is aligning their curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards to ensure that all students make progress in their learning, however teachers are not taking ownership in this process.

### Impact

The lack of teacher ownership in the process of aligning the curriculum to the Common Core hinders the school from making curricular decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school is designing and aligning their curriculum programs with the Common Core Learning Standards using consultants from Innovative Design for Education. They are specifically looking to see how they can align the Scholastic Code X literacy program and find resources to supplement the program as well as fill any gaps in the standards as presented. However, the school has yet to make adequate progress on this work. Teacher teams are not involved in this process and the consultants are not currently focusing on key standards from the Common Core. The principal mentioned in her interview that the teachers are not able to teach the challenging data in the lessons based on her observations. The result is the absence of engaging tasks that challenge students' thinking, thereby hindering academic growth.
- Even though the school's total population includes 29% special education students and 20% English language learners, the academic tasks observed in classrooms did not show diversity in terms of teaching strategies and lesson structures. All students were involved in simple or low-level tasks with no evidence of scaffolding for these students with disabilities or English language learners. These classroom opportunities do not ensure that all students are engaged and their needs met, which hampers students' ability to fully participate in instruction and limits their potential for academic progress.
- Students could not discuss the unit of study or actual assignments or projects that they were working on. Additionally, the activities in the majority of classrooms visited did not adequately challenge all learners in all subgroups.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Teachers are meeting to discuss student data and there are developing leadership structures for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practice.

### Impact

The work of inquiry teams is loosely connected to school goals and beginning to have a positive impact on instruction and student outcomes.

### Supporting Evidence

- All teachers are on department and grade teams, yet the inquiry process was not observed as being embedded in their work. The principal mentioned that she gave teachers the article *Harnessing the Power of Professional Learning Communities* and provided them with professional development on looking at student work. She also initially provided teachers a protocol to use when looking at student work and is trying to find another inquiry protocol to support teams' work. During the vertical English team meeting, no protocol was observed being used in the analysis of students' post-tests of Unit 1 of the Scholastic Code X program. In addition, teachers were not analyzing one particular grade's test. They are still developing skills that would allow for investigations regarding student performance and pedagogical practices.
- Teachers are part of teams that use data analysis as a method of changing instructional practice in order to improve student outcomes. However, the teams are at the developing stages and do not yet have the capacity that allows for focused, deep analysis of data to understand the relationships between instructional strategies and student outcomes.
- The principal has picked chairs in each department who meet with the assistant principal weekly for an hour to analyze data and plan instructional practices, which is then turn keyed to the other teachers in that department. Even though the principal has trained teachers in facilitating inquiry teams, particular teachers mentioned that administrators ran and sometimes dominated the meetings.

**Findings**

While pedagogy provides lessons that engage students, the use of higher level questioning, rigorous lessons and strategic entry points and extensions that foster deep reasoning in student work products varies across the school.

**Impact**

Varied teaching strategies lead to missed opportunities for all learners, including the school's subgroups, to exhibit consistently high levels of thinking and to take ownership of their learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Based on the recommendation from the previous Quality Review, the principal's expectation is for teachers and individual teacher teams to plan differentiated lessons using student data to guide their targeted adjustments. However, in virtually all classes observed, there was no evidence of students clustered for small group instruction; lessons did not consistently reflect differentiation of modalities or a wide range of learning opportunities, especially for higher functioning students. This hampers a student's ability to fully participate in instruction, reducing engagement and the opportunity for all students to produce meaningful work products that demonstrate higher levels of thinking.
- While students were observed being well behaved and engaged in some classrooms, assigned tasks do not sufficiently produce consistent engagement or higher-order work products across grades or disciplines. Similarly, some student notebooks and work folders did not show sufficient evidence of tiered supports to ensure consistent progress for struggling learners. This was also reinforced at the parent meeting where parents said that they did not feel the work the children were bringing home was challenging enough. Consequently, teachers do not know what students have learned, or how well and if immediate intervention and clarification can benefit the progress of those students.
- The school has begun to identify rigor with the use of Webb's Depth of Knowledge categories. Teacher teams use the Depth of Knowledge wheel to assess the level of tasks and instructional activities in a given unit. They have also been introduced to the Hess Rigor Matrix, developed by Karen K. Hess, which integrates Bloom's cognitive process dimensions and Depth of Knowledge levels into a format for examining the depth of understanding required for different tasks. However, in classes observed, the level of instruction was not rigorous enough to provide appropriate challenge, especially in terms of implementing effective higher-level questioning that facilitates higher-order thinking and extends the learning experience for all students.

**Findings**

Teachers are developing assessments and grading processes that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula, and there are inconsistent checks for understanding and student self-assessment happening across classrooms.

**Impact**

There is not yet a cohesive system that ensures that all teachers know their individual students' needs, strengths, achievement and learning styles across the curriculum on an ongoing basis. The practices that are in place loosely guide adjustments in units and lessons to meet students' learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The principal mentioned that teacher and teacher teams did not use rubrics to assess student work the previous year. Because of this, the principal has provided professional development at the beginning of the school year on rubrics and their importance in assessing student work. However, not all teachers currently use rubrics. Some teachers and teacher teams developed rubrics and checklists but only use them for performance tasks and end-of-unit tests. There are some teachers who give rubrics in advance prior to the teaching of a particular unit and some teachers are using the state rubrics for writing. There are different student rubrics that the students use to reflect on homework, mini-tasks or flash-drafts, which affects uniformity. This difference in rubrics prevents teachers from collecting meaningful information on their practice that could help guide teachers towards meeting all students' needs and designing lessons that more fully engage students in the learning process.
- It is the principal's expectation that student feedback from teachers should include a positive aspect the student was able to do and a recommendation on how the student can move to the next level for a specific task based on the rubric. However, in looking at teacher feedback, some teachers' comments were not in the language of the rubric. In addition, there was no comment for improvement for students who scored a Level 3 or 4. Teachers not identifying their students' more granular strengths and needs hinder opportunities to improve learning outcomes as well as provide meaningful information on instructional practice.
- Based on the fair rating the school achieved on the 2013-2014 Middle School Quality Statement on assessing student learning, the school developed a six-week assessment calendar across all grades and subject areas. The calendar maps out pre- and post-assessments for every unit taught. This practice was not done in every department previously. The principal explained that she is planning to use Skedula to check for student growth. However, because the school spent the entire month of October administering the Measures of Student Learning tests, teachers have yet to start this practice. Since this is still under development, its impact on meeting the needs of all learners could not yet be determined.