



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Dr. Susan S. McKinney  
Secondary School of the Arts**

**Middle-High School K265**

**101 Park Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11205**

**Principal: Michael Walker**

**Date of review: December 17, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

## The School Context

Dr. Susan S. McKinney Secondary School of the Arts is a middle-high school with 434 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 72% Black, 24% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 21% students with disabilities. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.5%.

## 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>Celebration</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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , 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>Additional Findings</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>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are consistently emphasized across grades and subjects.

### Impact

Curricular decisions build coherence and promote college and career readiness, as all students have access to rigorous and engaging tasks.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across planning documents reviewed, standards consistently informed learning tasks. Those standards include: Describe and explain the structures and functions of the human body at different organizational levels; write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through selection, organization and analysis of relevant content; and solve linear equations with rational number coefficients, including equations whose solutions require expanding expressions using the distributive property and collecting like terms.
- An English Language Arts (ELA) and a social studies lesson plan both had the instructional shift: cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from text, embedded in the tasks.
- An ELA lesson plan focused on the close reading of a text through questions such as: “Why does the writer begin the text with a question?”, “What can you infer about the top contenders for the *New Seven Wonders* based on the author’s use of fate in paragraph 3?”, and “What evidence supports the idea that the wonders are worth preservation?”
- In the analysis section of a science lab packet, students had to write a short response to the real world scenario: Some state roads are salted heavily in the winter, creating an environmental problem. Based on observations you made in this laboratory activity, explain how organisms could be harmed by high levels of salt from roadways.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Though teaching practices across classrooms are aligned to the curricula, they are only beginning to reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. In addition, across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Impact

Students are not consistently demonstrating higher-order thinking skills or producing meaningful work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership claimed that the school's shared beliefs of how students learned best consist of accountable talk, leveled questioning, Cornell note taking (annotation), writing and an emphasis on vocabulary. However, when opportunities arose during instruction to utilize one or more of these strategies, teachers' implementation was inconsistent. For example, in a social studies class and a math class, accountable talk was not used at all, as discussions were teacher-centered. In one ELA class that was reading articles, annotation was not used at all, yet in another class, students were engaged in annotation, but there were no clear expectations of what or how to prioritize using the close reading strategy.
- During a science lab, students were fully engaged in a collaborative process where roles were clearly defined and students asked were able to articulate an understanding of the scientific concepts that they were exploring. Without referencing notes or his lab packet, a student stated, "Diffusion is when molecules go from a high level of concentration to a low level of concentration."
- In a social studies class, the culminating activity was for students to create a skit, rap, comic strip or Cornell notes to outline and discuss the Dred Scott case. However, no criteria were provided to ensure that the work products would effectively meet the learning objective.
- During a lesson focused on building analysis through the arts, students were asked to analyze and interpret images. The activity required students to make literal observations and then possible inferences based on those observations. When filling out the graphic organizer provided, students wrote the feelings "happy" or "sad" as literal observations of the facial expressions found within the images. However, these responses were inferences themselves. The teacher or paraprofessional in the room, who encouraged students to make inferences based on the inferences already made, did not correct the error.
- In an upper grade ELA class, students were observed using clearly outlined writing criteria to assess student level work. Comments included, "She rushed the essay. There's evidence but she doesn't expand on it." Another was overheard in his group saying, "She doesn't have the main topic sentence that she needs to support." As groups successfully completed the analysis of a piece of sample writing, a more difficult essay was provided for them to evaluate. The teacher challenged his students by saying, "Can you guys talk about how she could turn this eight into a nine?"

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, assessment practices are aligned with the school's curricula and consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Students and teachers are provided with actionable feedback regarding student performance and achievement. In addition, teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- Students referenced their use of rubrics primarily on writing tasks. "When we have essays, we use them to follow the steps to make them perfect." A student shared a piece of work that had the comment: "I see some relevant text based evidence accurately explaining the author's use of characterization to bring out the idea of survival." When discussing how they would improve on specific previously graded assignments, students responded, "I should have annotated before answering the questions," and "Next time I'll give more evidence."
- Near the end of the lab period, the science teacher allowed students to pose questions and concerns. One student said that her group might have added too much starch, which might have affected the results. The teacher asked the class, "What may be some possible affects?" Students provided various responses. The teacher never provided a correct answer, and instead prompted other students to address misconceptions with questions such as, "What might be the reason for that?" In acknowledging the potential error, the teacher encouraged the group not to start over, but to note observations and see what interesting things they might discover, given the direction their experiment was going in.
- A math teacher consistently checked for understanding by asking process-oriented questions of his students such as: "Can someone explain how they went about solving...?", "Is she correct?", and "What else can she do?" The teacher charted student responses so that others could follow along and comment. He also allowed a student to explain his thinking even though the suggestion was incorrect. He then addressed the student's confusion before proceeding with the lesson.

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

School leaders consistently communicate expectations to the entire staff. Teachers and staff establish a culture of learning that communicates expectations for students.

### Impact

School administration is developing training and systems of accountability for the expectations communicated. School staff is developing the level of detail and clarity needed to help prepare middle school students for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership noted that their pedagogical expectations are communicated through professional learning sessions, observation feedback, and teacher team meetings. However, when looking at the school's professional learning plan, only one session in the first four months of the school year was explicitly dedicated to two of the school's five instructional foci. When sharing observation feedback from the classes visited, use of content specific vocabulary was noted consistently, while questioning and writing were referenced a few times. Cornell note taking and accountable talk were not mentioned after classes where there was a text-based task and/or class discussion.
- Though addressing such relevant topics as attendance, scholarship reports, rubrics for grading, and gap analysis reporting, most of the teacher team meeting agendas reviewed did not show a direct connection to the school's five instructional foci. One ELA department meeting agenda dated for the day of the Quality Review clearly showed Main idea, Evidence, Link, Concluding statement (MEL-Con) and Cornell notes as writing skills being covered.
- High school students are provided with various supports for preparing for the next level such as marking period report card reflection forms and *Sparking the Future* curricula, which has lessons geared towards college awareness, college tours, and internships. However, there was insufficient evidence of comparable measures for middle school students as they work toward high school.
- When asked how the school prepares them for the next level, either high school or college, a high school student replied, "We have a class called, 'College and Careers'." Another stated, "During advisory, we sit down with the guidance counselors and they explain college, how, why, CUNY [City University of New York] versus out of state colleges." A middle school student said, "*i-Ready* helps me to be good in math."

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations on teams that are ineffectively connected to school goals or the inquiry approach.

**Impact**

The impact across teacher teams does not typically result in improved teacher practice or progress toward goals for groups of students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The ELA team had a prepared agenda that included welcome and introductions, review of our last department meeting, looking at student work, reflection focused on argumentative writing, and next steps. In addition, the looking at student work activity used a protocol. However, the structure of the observed meeting was inconsistent with the agenda. The team instead engaged in a conversation about the instruction of counterclaim that was not based on student work or data.
- The ELA team provided documents that showed their ongoing collaborative work on improving student argumentative writing. Student work showed that a student stated an opinion but provided no evidence to support it. The team discussed possible strategies to address this skill deficiency as well as others. They did one round of inter-visitation focused on the instruction of argumentative writing and provided each other with feedback. One specific instructional strategy was to teach how to show, not tell in student writing. Upon assessing the same students in the same skills a month later, the student tracker showed that the student had provided evidence to support her opinion. Her next step was to put the evidence in an order that would make her point more convincing.
- There was insufficient evidence of other departments engaging in such inquiry based collaborative work that involved the analysis of student work or data that resulted in moving specific sub-groups of students while improving their collective practices.