



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**Midwood High School**

**High School K405**

**2839 Bedford Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11210**

**Principal: Michael McDonnell**

**Date of review: April 14, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

## The School Context

Midwood High School is a high school with 3,988 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 35% Asian, 29% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 22% White students. The student body includes 3% English Language Learners and 8% students with disabilities. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 93.9%.

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

## Area of Celebration

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

School leaders consistently communicate expectations that teachers engage students in rigorous tasks as well as use purposeful questioning and discussion techniques during instruction. Teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations and offer ongoing feedback and supports to students.

### Impact

Teachers receive training and are held accountable for implementing rigorous tasks and effective questioning and discussion practices. Students engage in experiences that prepare them for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- A review of the school's monthly newsletter, *Buzzz*, revealed consistent messaging aligned to school leadership's expectations, specifically in a section dedicated to some of the teaching highlights observed during walkthroughs. The January edition notes a student discussion in a social studies class on the role of the church in the Middle Ages. The February issue acknowledges a rigorous activity observed in a science class, "... we saw a rigorous 'Do Now' activity in which students had to determine the likely physical characteristics of an offspring based on genetic traits of the parents."
- Professional development to provide training on rigorous instruction included student grouping strategies informed by student reading ability and grammar usage. The session also focused participants on strategically designing leveled questions in their lesson plans, as informed by Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) framework. DOK focused departmental walkthroughs were conducted by school leadership. A summative write up of the social studies department noted which teachers posed questions by DOK level, as well as individualized next steps for department members who needed it.
- Students noted that although they are in a large school, communication between them and staff is one of the best parts of their experience. One online platform keeps students abreast of their grades and overall performance in classes. Another is used by the college office to email students as needed. Students also value use of the college office in person. One stated, "I was not stressed out about the college process at all. Someone is always available." At the time of the Quality Review, 94.9% of all seniors had applied to four-year colleges.
- Students spoke of the numerous ways in which the school prepares them for life after graduation. They mentioned the ways in which they have access to college level instruction, including over twenty Advanced Placement (AP) courses, College Now, and robotics and foreign language classes for college credit. The Social Science and Natural Science Research Programs engage participating students in college level research in consultation with off-site mentors from multiple colleges and universities, many with doctoral degrees. The medical science track exposes students to various disciplines within the medical field.

## Area of Focus

<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 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

- Within each department, a number of teachers elect to serve on a data team as an administrative duty option. A review of discussion notes from a number of data team meetings revealed goals such as determining what data to analyze, how analysis would be implemented, and how to hold students accountable. Minutes from a meeting stated outcomes such as Regents packets were ineffective and a suggestion to determine standards to address during Saturday prep sessions. Math data team members noted, “In the fall we talked about what makes a teacher team,” and “We weren’t given much direction as to how to analyze data.” They also shared that last year they administered three benchmark assessments, yet this year they had only given one. Comparative data that can track student progress was not used in their work.
- A teacher team was observed using a critical friends protocol where team members examine each other’s lessons, offer feedback and address next steps. After the presenting teacher did an overview of the lesson, the team engaged in the primary learning activity of the lesson and annotated a poem. The team then took two minutes to write down questions for their colleague, before copies of the lesson plan and student work samples were distributed. Teachers asked questions such as, “When did you read aloud?”, “Do they read, or both?”, “Why did you ask?” and “What is the feel?” versus “How did it make you feel?” Constructive feedback included, “There were a lot of things going on. It may be helpful to focus on one or two,” and “I would reword questions to be more specific.” At the meeting’s end, numerous recommendations were provided, however, it was not clear how the feedback would be prioritized or what strategies the presenting teacher intended to implement.
- Teachers from one grade team mentioned that in looking at student work, it was clear that students were not developing their topics through an analysis of text. Teachers from another grade noted that their gap analysis of student writing uncovered that students need to introduce claims that are more precise. With both examples, there was insufficient evidence of what strategies teachers purposefully implemented to address these skills, how their pedagogy improved as a result, or the impact on student writing.

## Additional Findings

<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

Purposeful decisions build curricular coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students. Higher order skills are embedded in curricular documents across grades and subjects for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- An earth science lesson plan contained an activity that asked, “Earth science is about how rotation affects seasons. Do you agree or disagree with this student? Be sure to use evidence from your notes, (Regents) Earth Science Reference Tables (ESRT) and your understanding of earth science to support your stance.” This task is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standard, “synthesizing information from a range of sources into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon or concept.” The lesson then required students to discuss their responses with tablemates and highlight any similarities and differences in their opinions, as well as possible criticism and additional questions.
- The instructional outcomes of an English Language Arts (ELA) lesson were for students to be able to identify the Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject and Tone (SOAPStone) in a text, lead a discussion by developing DOK questions, and analyze rhetoric in nonfiction text. These tasks require that students engage in Common Core standards such as cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis, determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text, and analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses.
- Another ELA lesson was designed to have students engage in the analysis of an author’s choices and make valid inferences about the theme of the text. In addition, the class would explore the author’s use of flashback and tension and the underlying message of the story.
- Real-world problems served as the context for a lesson on the features of quadratic functions. Aligned to both New York State and Common Core Learning Standards, the task required that students address five real-world scenarios using quadratic functions while working in groups. One problem dealt with a laundry owner’s estimation of weekly profits in relation to the number of workers she hired. Another problem used a function to model the path of a kicked football, as students had to figure out how many feet away from the point where the football was kicked was it at its highest point, and how high was the ball above the ground at its highest point?

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers consistently implement strategies that reflect the belief that students learn best when they collaborate and discuss with each other to develop quality work products.

### **Impact**

Teachers effectively use Danielson *Framework for Teaching* informed practices that support and promote student discussions that reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- During a social studies class, students discussed whether they thought people in Iran would perceive life as better or worse after the revolution. “I think it would definitely be worse for women during the shah’s rule, because they would have to totally cover their bodies.” Another student commented that it was worse before the revolution because Iran had a good relationship with the United States and after the revolution that changed. Over the course of the discussion, students agreed or disagreed with one another and at times read from and referenced articles to support their assertions.
- In an AP English class, groups of students annotated text and placed post-it notes with text based information on them in designated quadrants: Tone/Rhetorical Device, Speaker, Subject/Purpose, or Audience/Occasion. In one group, a post-it in the Tone/Rhetorical Device section read, “The author uses parallelism to clarify what he means by strength and weakness in the first six lines.” When a student said that the speaker in the text was a scientist, the teacher pushed the class’s thinking by stating, “I don’t just want to know that the speaker is a scientist. That’s great, but that’s level one. I want to know how the piece develops ethos through the speaker’s credibility as a scientist.”
- Students in a chemistry class worked in groups to discover and distinguish between a redox and a non-redox reaction. They explained the difference as it relates to gaining or losing electrons. One student said to a peer, “You know that H has a charge of plus one, right?” When asked to explain their understanding in writing, a student wrote, “We can see the loss and gain of electrons in the reaction.” Students took out and referred to notes taken during previous lessons to address the task at hand.

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

School staff is developing in their use of common assessments to determine student progress across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### **Impact**

Curricular adjustments and instructional decisions informed by assessment data have yet to result in all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, demonstrating increased mastery. Teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet the learning needs of their students.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers produced samples of test data showing evidence of the analysis of student performance. For example, one document outlined an itemized breakdown of questions from a math Regents exam. Conceptual topics were ranked by percent correct. Problems pertaining to linear equation of a function from a table had 70.3% correct, whereas those related to arithmetic operations with polynomials were at 28.9%. Another document noted the distracter cause for students getting an incorrect answer, which read “equivalent forms of expressions and completing the square.” Similarly, a spreadsheet analyzed data from a social studies final exam. The headings on the document identify the topic, skill, percent correct and incorrect, most popular incorrect answer and justification for wrong answer. One finding from this analysis was that 68% of students incorrectly answered a question regarding the reconstruction. They concluded that the reason was that the material was not covered extensively in class because it was taught at the end of the term, and students see Lincoln as the emancipator, not the politician. In both of these instances, it was not evident how teacher understanding of student misconception informed adjustments to instruction or curricula.
- A science teacher has students write responses to do nows as well as discussion and reflection points daily on a tracker that she reviews while circulating to assess student understanding. Another teacher circulates with an electronic tablet and scores students on the quality of assignment completion. Other classes noted the use of exit tickets in lesson plans. However, it was not evident that these checks for understanding consistently result in effective adjustments to meet the students’ learning needs across classrooms.
- School leaders noted that student self-assessment takes place, but “not everywhere.” This was confirmed in conversations with students. When asked if they use rubrics or check-lists to grade their own work, their responses were, “Sometimes” and “It depends.”