



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

New MS at K437

Elementary-Middle School K839

**713 Caton Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11218**

Principal: Michael Perlberg

**Date of review: May 13, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

New MS at K437 is an elementary-middle school with 106 students in grade 6. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 14% Asian, 14% Black, 33% Hispanic, and 36% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 25% students with disabilities. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 is not available due to new school status.

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	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 <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	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:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, strategically integrate the instructional shifts, and emphasize rigorous habits in curricula and tasks in a coherent way across subjects.

Impact

School leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions to build instructional coherence and promote college and career readiness and higher-order skills so that all learners demonstrate thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- In a school-wide Expeditionary Learning case study, students explore the benefits, costs, and justness of the changes facing the Gowanus Canal community. This includes field work to study the canal's water, and results in several tasks where students demonstrate learning. After their research, students draft and publish a children's book that details the role waterways play in human society and develop a discussion guide for teaching the story to elementary school students. The culminating essay requires students to compare and contrast societal changes to early river civilizations to changes to the Gowanus Canal community. For each task students engage in the writing process from brainstorming, reading mentor texts, and gathering and evaluating evidence, to drafting, revising and publishing. Additionally, math and science students created poster boards with design proposals for what the "new improved Lowe's Esplanade" might look like supported by water quality analysis, and claims and evidence to justify their design reasoning. Therefore, this case study connects tasks to current issues relevant to students' lives and linked across content areas.
- One reading task regarding farm labor and the Fair Food Program required students to read, annotate, and write responses to prompt questions. All students reach for the same learning target, but the task was modified for lower-level readers with additional thinking prompts, shorter texts and vocabulary definitions for reference. Additionally, advanced learners responded to a final prompt about the Fair Food Program, "Why do you think major corporations like Wendy's and Safeway still have not signed this agreement?" Similarly, in a task to analyze the elements of Op-Ed writing, a modified outline included paragraph by paragraph thinking prompts to support students as they wrote reactions to what they read. This was the foundation to prepare students for writing their own opinion pieces. Student work products reflect the emphasis placed on rigorous writing tasks across subjects.
- In a case study focused on the impact of justice system innovations, students annotated historical texts such as *Hammurabi's Code in Mesopotamia* to determine its argument about justice. Students apply what they learn when they compare and contrast zero tolerance and restorative justice practices in on-demand writing and in a Socratic seminar to discuss the effectiveness of methods for maintaining justice such as trial by jury, or an eye for an eye. The second case study transitions to justice in schools and the Chancellor's discipline code. To complement this work, one math task in a case study requires students to represent the suspension rates at schools that practice restorative justice with schools that practice zero tolerance on dot plots to determine if there is a difference in safety data.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies are beginning to provide multiple entry points into the curricula for all learners. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of participation.

Impact

Student engagement in challenging tasks do not typically provide opportunity for all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, and high performers to demonstrate equally high levels of thinking and participation across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across most classrooms create opportunities for students to think together and to collaborate on work products in small groups. For example, the learning target in a set of math classes was to “analyze and describe a data set based on its measures of central tendency”, and students were given a list of National Basketball Association players and their salaries from which to determine the mean, median and mode salary. Although students were seated in groups, they worked independently at first. They appeared unclear as to how to calculate the large numbers. As the teacher circulated, students typically reached out for his support before engaging with each other. In a second class engaged in the same lesson, one of the teachers recognized that several students needed more time, and this was given. However, it was not communicated to students, and this did not account for students who had completed, or who were at different places in their understanding. Therefore, students did not have the opportunity to engage in productive struggle and to work together to construct meaning.
- In a science class, students worked at stations to make observations about the saw mills they constructed collaboratively the day before. One student pointed out, “We built the machines yesterday, and today we are analyzing them.” One station invited students to test the different colored, gear rotations to determine what might happen if the gears were switched, and another station provided background information from a text, *What’s the Story with Wheels*. The teacher also showed a video of a saw mill so that students had another way to learn more about their construction. Some students were deeply engaged in observing the gears and discussing what they were learning and why, “We are learning about how simple machines work, the gears, axel and wheels, because we are going to build a bicycle.” However, not all students had an equitable voice in this group process. Therefore, some students sat silently while others engaged more actively in the station discussions.
- In the set of humanities classes, students were engaged in a study of three models of justice: trial by jury, broken windows, and native justice with a group of peers. While students each contributed to the poster to capture key points and the pros and cons of the model, one student, the learning ambassador, was tasked with presenting what the group learned to peers who had not studied the same justice model. While this provided students with the opportunity to learn from peers, participation during presentations was uneven as some students dominated the discussions while others sat silently.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teachers use or create assessments, and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula. Common assessments measure student progress toward goals across subjects.

Impact

Teachers provide students and each other with actionable feedback regarding student achievement. The use of common assessments results in adjustments to practice to meet most students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers assess student skill mastery using short- and long-term learning targets aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Learning targets are written as "I can" statements and are included in all lesson plans. This, the principal offered, aligns to "our philosophy that if students are given time and feedback they can make progress over time." For example, a math class tracker monitored student progress toward the learning target "understanding operations with fractions to solve real world math problems" from November to January. After the pre-assessment, the Integrated Collaborative Teacher team adjusted its lessons from whole- to small-group instruction, included warm ups with visuals, and, according to the lesson plan reviewed, students were to consider what a problem was asking for prior to solving. Students then discussed their process and what proved difficult. This targeted support resulted in 3 of the 5 students with disabilities meeting the learning target. Additionally, the teachers recognized that an extension problem was necessary for students who mastered the target. In this case, students were to determine what fraction of a full bottle of chocolates would be left over after distributing three quarters of a bottle to friends. Thus, in tracking student progress, teachers made targeted adjustments to meet the needs of their students.
- Teachers track students' reading progress using the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment. The assessment provides teachers with student reading levels and targets how well students have mastered skills such as understanding craft and structure or key ideas and details. This enables teachers to track reading progress across classrooms, and thereby, informs adjustments to practice. For example, based on the DRP data, teachers adjusted their lessons to move away from reading a whole class text to engaging students in literature circles. In this way, teachers dedicate time to conferencing with students and students read and discuss texts of their choice. Additionally, during independent reading time students are held accountable for their learning during book talks, and in two classrooms, student book reviews lined the wall. This resulted in an increase in sixth grade reading levels from 56% in the fall to 61% in the mid-year assessment.
- Students receive rubric-aligned feedback on written work that is evident on student work products. For example, feedback on an argument essay alerted the student to creating a claim that offered insight into the essay's thesis and for a comparison/contrast essay, to "make sure that evidence consistently refers to similarities and differences between the texts. This will help you to choose evidence more convincingly." Teachers have ongoing opportunities to share student work with colleagues to identify and implement approaches intended to improve student performance such as balancing small group and direct instruction, more concrete directions, and higher level exemplars to "focus on growth."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations connected to college and career readiness to families, and teacher teams establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations to all students.

Impact

Families are informed of their student's progress toward set expectations, and students receive ongoing feedback to support their preparation for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents expressed their appreciation for the school's project-based work such as the Gowanus Canal case study that linked multiple subjects from science and math to the humanities. One parent shared, "My son taught me how the water system worked." Parents also noted that their children are learning to work cooperatively which they see as preparing students for the future. Additionally, parents access their children's grades from the school's online grading platform, receive standards-based report cards that delineate students' academic accomplishments as well as their work habits and behavior, and expressed appreciation for the intuitiveness of standards-based grading. As one parent noted, "I like knowing how my child is improving in a skill rather than just whether work is completed. This helps me to understand exactly what my child does well and where he needs support."
- Twice a year, students select work from their portfolios that reflect their learning and progress in student-led conferences with families. During the Crew class, support is provided for all students in planning their presentations, "curating" their portfolios, and reflecting on their academic goals. As one parent noted, the Crew class helps students to discern if a piece is strong and what makes it so. Students will also share the learning targets they have not yet met and their action plan for achieving mastery. In a reflection after one conference, one parent wrote, "You [the student] were very clear in showing us what you know and what you need to improve in," and the advisor's feedback for next steps to the student was to cite specific evidence to demonstrate what was learned. Additionally, parents receive Expedition Guides at the start of all expeditions that include the major projects, questions families can ask their child to extend learning at home, and a summary of the case study. Expeditions culminate in a "Celebration of Learning" to provide families with a chance to see their children's final work. These celebrations are planned by the school's teacher teams.
- The Crew curricula supported this year's students with their transition to middle school while also providing a safe space for thinking critically about their roles as leaders, collaborators, and their readiness for high school. This is an opportunity to process the day's learning, set academic and personal goals, self-advocate, and learn to speak and present in public. In the Crew class visited, students were setting goals for writing, reading, math, history, and art. Sample goals were provided, but most students set their own such as to be more organized, offer more details, use meaningful evidence, and read for 30 minutes every night. This work was laying the groundwork for students to create academic action plans.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based collaborations that promote school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place that build teachers' leadership capacity.

Impact

The work of teacher teams strengthens teacher's instructional capacity, and teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Weekly team meetings provide opportunities for teachers to plan interdisciplinary learning expeditions that result in teacher-generated case studies grounded in real world contexts. For example, in one meeting the team generated ideas to jumpstart the Food Glorious Food expedition with ideas such as a neighborhood walk to track the types of food options in a given area, or having students research McDonald's locations across the city to note trends, and comparing several food items to determine which students might think offer a healthier choice such as an Arizona iced tea or a chocolate cupcake. The team considered what students would need to know to accurately predict the type of exercise that would cancel out food intake. The work was grounded in considering students' perspective with curricula decisions made by the teachers who also noted that they would focus on exemplary work products aligned to the Criteria for Quality Expeditions at the next meeting as they continue to design the case study.
- During the humanities meeting, the team leader facilitated a discussion regarding the learning ambassador roles students engaged in that day, a key decision made by the team to increase student engagement and ownership of their learning. Notably, the learning ambassadors interacted with peers who actively participated during the presentations by asking questions and taking notes. The team leader noticed that few students generated similarities among the justice systems, and suggested making adjustments in "real time" by bringing small groups together to "dig deeper" into their topics and, therefore, choose their evidence more thoughtfully. Teachers also recognized that students returned to the presenter's posters for evidence when they began their comparison/contrast essays. After reviewing students' written work one teacher offered that a focus might be to, "Align organizational skills beyond the micro level to focus on [strengthening an] essay's ideas." This was agreed to. The team leader concluded the meeting with a reminder that the team would continue their planning of the case study by looking at another sampling of student work in continued ownership of the progress of their students.
- Teams are provided with two full planning days for each expedition with support from the school's designer during which teams provide each other with feedback on curricula drafts based on the 4Ts: targets, texts, topics, and tasks. This fosters ongoing cross-curricular planning. Additionally, the sixth grade team and school leaders engage in inquiry cycles, each with a targeted focus. For example, during inquiry cycle one the team focused on student-led conferences. There have already been two student conferences and parents wholly appreciated this structure for the insight they gained into their child's learning. The next cycle addressed student discussion and differentiation and evidence of this emphasis was reflected in student-led discussions in the two humanities classrooms visited.