



# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**M.S. 243 Center School**

**Middle School M243**

**100 West 84<sup>th</sup> Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10024**

**Principal: Elaine Schwartz**

**Date of review: January 13, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

## The School Context

M.S. 243 Center School is a middle school with 229 students from grade 5 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 8% Asian, 15% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 62% White students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners and 10% students with disabilities. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 97.9%.

## 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>Focus</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>Additional Findings</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 high expectations, provide training and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

As a result, there is a culture of learning in which staff and students are supported in meeting high expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- Although the principal uses some traditional methods of communication such as emails and a newsletter to communicate with her 8 teachers, most of the communication of high expectations happen through daily, personal exchange. The principal has the opportunity to meet with staff during common preps and lunch time. Additionally, she is in the classroom daily and provides teachers with daily informal feedback as well as feedback aligned with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.
- The entire staff as a whole participates in professional development aligned to the Bard College Writing and Thinking curriculum. The entire staff attends summer institutes and is provided with opportunities to participate in yearlong workshops on a rotating basis. Teachers share all learnings from workshops or visits to other schools with each other regardless of grade or content. This is an integral part of the school's non-graded curriculum in which teachers teach multiple contents and disciplines.
- The school is built on an advisory model and these advisors communicate weekly with parents on student progress, career and college readiness, as well as social and academic behaviors. Parents stated that teachers backpack information and regularly send emails, syllabi, progress reports and "Narrative report cards." However, parents state that the strongest component of parent communication is their relationship with the child's advisor. Advisors are the link between the school, child and home. Parents stated that advisors call them personally and completely understand the student's academic work as well as a student's social-emotional maturity, learning style and capacity. Parents stated that this ongoing communication allows them to be constantly involved in their student's progress and to provide needed support to ensure student growth.
- Parents' spoke about student ownership and connected this to career and college readiness. They stated that the school immerses all grade 5 students in a curriculum called "Getting It Together" where students are taught organization and study techniques that ensure students understand academic expectations. This class teaches students advocacy and how to question teachers about grades and projects. The class also teaches students to keep planners and note-taking strategies for lectures. Parents stated that as a result, students keep organized notes that they can use for studying and understand how to plan their time to meet upcoming project deadlines. One parent stated, "This class is like a freshman college class."

## Area of Focus

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

Across classrooms, teachers use grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula and assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

### Impact

As a result, there are missed opportunities to provide students with targeted, actionable feedback and to gather student data so that teachers are able to make adjustments to lessons to meet student needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- In a creative writing workshop class, students were editing a piece of creative non-fiction writing using a "self-interview" as the basis for fictional writing. Students were observed using a "self-editing criteria" sheet composed of two columns. One column listed criteria for the piece and the other column stated "write yes or no or a comment". The criteria listed included "Does the piece include varied information from your self-interview?", "Does every sentence begin with a capital?", and "Is your opinion creative? Why or why not?" When one student was asked what she needed to do to get a high grade or strengthen her writing, the student replied "I don't know, but the teacher told the entire class that the most important thing in this assignment was to work really, really hard and be very, very creative."
- While a Literacy Analysis Essay rubric displays criteria that is clearly aligned to the content through components such as thesis statement and use of evidence and examples, and provides a clear description, such as a level 4 for the thesis statement requiring "a clear thesis that expresses an opinion and previews the points to be discuss," not all rubrics used in the school are similarly aligned or as clearly defined. In another writing class studying song lyrics, students used a scoring rubric to inform their work as they created original songs. This 4-point rubric did not include criteria aligned to the content taught in class which included comparing lyrics to poetry and the use of literary elements. Similarly, a PowerPoint rubric used in another class measured criteria such as work ethic which was defined as the effective use of class time and ability to follow directions and did not provide information on content or on the skills necessary to create an effective PowerPoint presentation.
- Almost all of the classrooms visited had 2 teachers. In general, the teacher leading the lesson circulated the room, while the other teacher remained seated. The teacher circulating the room asked students how they were doing or gave them general encouragement such as "nice." Teachers were not observed recording any student data or asking questions related to the content taught in class.
- In a math class working on scientific notation, the teacher stood at the front of the room leading a review of the homework. The teacher told the students to keep in mind that 3 cubed did not equal 9. He said, "Did anyone get that wrong? If you did, then correct it." Many students were observed erasing their homework. One student asked another student for the answer and was told by his classmate that 3 times 3 was 9 and if you multiplied it by 3 the answer was 27.

## 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 the Common Core Learning Standards to promote college and career readiness for all students. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects.

### Impact

A fluid, multi-grade curriculum exposes students to creative, Common Core-aligned instruction that emphasizes higher-order thinking skills.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a nontraditional, progressive curriculum based on Bard's Writing and Thinking philosophy. This curriculum exposes students to interdisciplinary, multi-grade classes in literature, history and Latin through reading and discussion of various author's works and through writer's workshops for the duration of a trimester resulting in a polished piece of prose. The school staff has made purposeful decisions to include the instructional shifts such as requiring student to write from sources, cite text-based evidence, use academic language, and incorporate more non-fiction through Bard's creative non-fiction writing approach. Unlike the multi-grade approach for the humanities, students are grouped by grade in mathematics to ensure that students are exposed to the appropriate key ideas and sequence for each grade. For example, the grade 5 math curriculum includes place value, expressions and patterns, measurement and geometry. Grade 6 math includes expressions and equations, factors and exponents. Grade 8 curriculum includes graphing quadratic equations and linear functions. Although the school currently uses a different text book for each grade in math, the principal and teachers are working towards building towards coherence across the grades by examining the sequence in each of these programs and beginning to align them.
- The goal of a forensic science unit is to have students be able to evaluate and distinguish between different types of biases that effect reliability of witness testimony. Students will compare notes on an event and discuss the evidence observed and the value of the testimony. Students will also examine confessions and police interrogations. Students will use this information to answer the question "What do you think can be done to prevent innocent people from being convicted for crimes they did not commit?"
- A unit on poetry focuses on examining a central theme through reading and connecting the works of Pablo Neruda, Elizabeth Bishop and Bob Marley to the central theme of dreams and memories. Students are asked to examine, evaluate and analyze aspects of social, personal and aesthetic questions when examining the writer's life and work. Students will examine how important memory is to a poet as well as how memory helps poets write. In the process of creating their own "Book of Dreams" students will make connections between various texts and examine author's craft as well as literary elements. This unit lists connections to the Common Core such as introducing a claim and organizing reasons with evidence logically and using accurate, credible sources.

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

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

### **Impact**

Teaching practices across the school support student discussion and the school belief that students learn best through open inquiry. Students consistently formulate their own questions and seek out creative answers.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- In one writing class, students worked on deconstructing a poem and used a critical lens approach to talk about the structure of the song as well as the literary elements used by the author. The teacher used close reading strategies to draw the students' attention to the stanza with the line "reach past the stars." The students then engaged each other in a conversation about the meaning of this phrase. They discussed the use of metaphor and how the meaning behind these lines were to push past one's limit. Once students understood the techniques the songwriter used, they began to work on their initial draft of the song they were crafting.
- In a forensic science class students witnessed a staged event in which a masked student came into their class and created a scene while the teacher stepped into the hallway. When the teacher came back into the room he asked students to record their observations and description of the intruders. Students worked silently and then offered testimony and descriptions that was disputed by other students. The class agreed that one of the intruders was from a set of twins in the school, but they were unsure as to which one of the twins was the intruder, leading students to the discussion of credibility of eyewitness statements to identify a crime suspect. As the teacher asked questions around the events, descriptions and testimony varied more and more leading to a conversation about the merits and deficiencies of eyewitness accounts.
- In a social studies class studying colonial life, students looked at historical illustrations and using evidence from past readings to make connections to what life was like as a child apprentice. Students engaged in discussion about how struggling colonial parents saw apprenticeships as career training. Other students added that parents saw apprenticeships as free room and board. Students then discussed colonial life for different members such as women, men and children.

<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 structured professional collaborations on teams where the use of an inquiry approach is developing. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused, however there is insufficient data to determine impact of these meetings.

**Impact**

As a result, there are missed opportunities to improve the capacities of teachers and to positively impact student progress towards goals.

**Supporting Evidence**

- In a teacher team inquiry meeting, teachers discussed a recent visit to another school and discussed the creative ways in which those students were asked to collect and display data such as recording their moods throughout the day. Teachers felt that these inquiry-based tasks integrated the content of the Common Core in a creative manner aligned to their educational philosophy. This conversation was a follow up on a previously documented meeting where teachers questioned how to cover topics in the curriculum. While the teachers referenced data from the previous year’s state exam, no new student data was observed.
- The math teacher team revisited an ongoing conversation about how to create coherence across the grades. One of the questions that they had was the fact that they are using a different math book in each one of the four grades. The teachers stated that ensuring that foundational content was difficult because the math sequence does not align and there are some topics that are not covered completely in a previous grade that impact the current grade. Some teachers stated that they are spiraling foundational content in class to ensure that students have exposure to these items. Teachers referenced outcomes from their classrooms as a need to develop coherence and expressed the need for grade- and strand-specific data to support them in making instructional decisions. One teacher stated that as a small school, many of teachers taught classes outside their specialty area, so having a clear portrait of topics aligned to the scope and sequence across the grade would be very helpful.
- A humanities teacher team stated that as a result of looking at data from the previous year’s state exam, they realized that they needed to include opportunities to ensure that students engaged in work that aligned to the standards such as citing evidence, developing a thesis statement and using primary documents in document-based question essays. To this end, the teachers revised some units to include the Common Core and instructional shifts as well as created rubrics to align student work to the standards. Teachers stated that they are looking at these work samples from the first trimester and will be using these observations to target students and to refine their pedagogy. No data was observed in this meeting.