



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

West End Secondary School

Middle-High School M291

**227-243 West 61st Street
Manhattan
NY 10023**

Principal: Jessica Jenkins

**Date of review: May 31, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

West End Secondary School is a middle-high school with 137 students in grade 6. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 9% Black, 18% Hispanic, and 64% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 23% students with disabilities. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%. 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	Additional Findings	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leader and all staff effectively communicate high expectations to families connected to a path to college and career readiness. All staff establishes a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations to all students and provide effective feedback and advisement supports for meeting expectations.

Impact

Parents are active partners in their children's academic progress, and all learners own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents partner with the school to support the growing community, and were an integral part of creating the school. This year in order to fully integrate parents into the school's philosophy for teaching and learning, the principal started a book group for parents. The purpose of this well-attended group is to expose parents to the Expeditionary Learning philosophy, and its importance to students' academic success. Parents discussed the value in learning about how this approach encourages student ownership of their learning that is grounded in real world contexts. This is also an additional forum for discussing ideas relevant to their children's academic progress.
- As one parent noted, "Parents are part of the team here, if the principal needs something she calls the parents in to get their input." Parents also helped to paint the school and put up bulletin boards. All this, one parent shared, is because "the principal is willing to empower parents to come up with solutions." Parents appreciate the honest conversations with the principal who is "as invested as any principal can be." Parents also spoke of the school's ongoing communication through weekly emails, the value of the online grading platform to access student progress, and the many opportunities to meet with teachers who, all parents noted, are available whenever a parent reaches out. "This school has an open-door policy where communication flows" one parent noted.
- In order to foster student ownership of their progress, and to provide additional support in literacy, students meet in Crew classes twice a week. During this class, students forge relationships with peers through literature circles, structured text-based discussions based on short texts, or books they are interested in discussing, and they engage in Socratic Seminars. This is also a time for students to meet independent reading requirements, and Crew teachers hold reading conferences and monitor student progress toward meeting expectations. Additionally, once a month a "Crew Parent" organizes an out-of-school experience and an in-school celebration breakfast to be a part of creating a strong academic community. Students also have opportunities to self-assess their learning and progress. To this end, students maintain self-assessment notebooks to monitor progress toward mastery of learning targets. Students also work with Crew leaders to prepare for passage presentations, and to ready their portfolios for student-led conferences. Students take charge of their presentation, share progress, and goals toward which they are working. The impact of this focus on students owning their next steps toward mastery of targets was reflected in classrooms and in discussions with students. One student offered that the standards-based grading process focuses less on "what you don't know and more on what you need to learn."

Area of Focus

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. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has strengthened teachers' instructional capacity and progress toward goals for groups of students, although not where they are coherently achieving increased mastery for all.

Supporting Evidence

- All teams engage in daily common planning time and weekly team meetings. At the start of the year teams created curricula that outlined long-term learning targets for what a sixth grader should know and be able to do by June. The team's curricula work laid a foundation from which teachers consistently review student work in order to refine tasks, provide each other with feedback on lessons, and focus on mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers co-plan learning expeditions and Standards Targets Assessment Maps (STAs), and reference students' mastery of learning targets to inform instruction. Additionally, teams set their own learning targets to achieve that include designing systems to help students create high quality work and using long-term learning targets to gauge student progress toward mastery. As a result of ongoing professional collaboration and planning, all curricula reviewed and the accompanying student work products were of consistent high quality. Additionally, in classrooms visited, all students are strategically grouped which is a direct result of team discussions in evidence in all team minutes. However, although teamwork is amply contributing to school goals for ongoing refinement of curricula, teams continue to work toward mastery for all students.
- All teams use formative assessment trackers to surface students' misconceptions, to group students for support in learning target mastery, and to maintain students' daily progress toward learning targets, such as identifying supporting details or using a rubric to guide writing. This results in surfacing skills to reteach and revisions to lessons. For example, the humanities team minutes indicated students' difficulty recognizing the impact of prophecy on plot, and students' misunderstanding of the term monomyth. Thus, the team strategized on how to structure small group instruction to address the misunderstandings. Additionally, all team minutes indicate students in need of support; however, interventions targeted to the specific needs of all learners were not consistently specified.
- As one teacher noted, "The focus is always on student work because it defines our process for the next day so we can modify on the spot." During the Quality Review, the math team debriefed their lesson, and looked at the resulting student writing. They agreed that their decision to provide sentence starters and an outline for math writing resulted in students' accurately describing their graphs. Additionally, after a review of learning target data, in particular for the bottom third of student readers, The English Language Arts team created four books clubs tiered by level. As a result of this decision, students' reading Lexile level increased from 44% to 52% from December to May.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

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

Impact

Curricula decisions result in coherence across subject areas, and promote college and career readiness for all students, so that all learners demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- All curricula is designed by teachers “from the ground up” and teachers create Common Core aligned STAs that reflect in-depth interdisciplinary investigations connected to real world issues. Each STA outlines long-term learning outcomes and the many tasks that are provided to support students to reach mastery. Typical tasks include essays, Socratic Seminars, laboratory reports, and data analysis. For example, in the “Down the Drain” expedition, students learn about New York City’s sewer system and the changes in the New York Harbor’s oyster population. Students study the oyster’s mortality rate, their living conditions, and engage in collecting and analyzing data about the biotic or abiotic components of the New York Harbor ecosystem in science. This culminates in an oyster laboratory report, and an evidence-based argument essay to recognize and defend how populations are impacted by changes in physical or biological components of an ecosystem. Ultimately, students determine if Pier 79’s conditions are sustainable for oysters. To complement this investigation, students learn math concepts relative to percentages and fractions to equip them with the skills for conducting their oyster analysis. Thus, learning expeditions and case studies are connected across subjects. As one student shared, “We did water quality analysis in science and graphing in math, and it was challenging.”
- All curricula emphasize writing. For example, humanities students engage in a multimodal character study and select a sampling of text excerpts that reflect the progression of a character’s positions throughout a text. To prepare for writing, students annotate texts to discern fact from opinion, analyze author’s purpose, and pre-sketch ideas for how author’s purpose impacts a narrator’s perspective. Students also create annotated bibliographies. Similarly, students write historically accurate paragraphs for the “Hero’s Journey” expedition in their study of Athens. One student shared that exposure to a lot of on-demand writing, “is like a pop quiz, but it is really good training for testing how much you know without studying.” For example, students were given a poem by Walt Whitman and told to figure out what it means. A student noted, “It was way above our level, and I really enjoyed that.”
- In a case study during which students study Mesopotamia and the Code of Hammurabi, the long-term learning target is to evaluate how the complex civilization helped shape Mesopotamia. To this end, students study how Mesopotamia became the cradle of civilization, its societal classes, and the significance of Hammurabi’s Code of Law to the development of a city-state. This culminates in a Socratic Seminar for which students prepare evidence, a set of “right there”, or “on my own” questions, and annotate a Mesopotamian Court Case to address the question, “Could Egyptian society have existed without the Nile?”

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across classrooms teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high quality supports into challenging curricula, and student work products reflect high levels of student thinking.

Impact

All learners have opportunity to demonstrate higher-order thinking in work products and discussions and take active ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In preparation for writing a three-paragraph data summary, students in two math classrooms engaged in activities to get feedback on their graphs, and to determine for themselves what constitutes exemplary work. In the first class, student groups moved to stations to review each other's graphs and provide each other with feedback. Students engaged in discussions to understand each other's process, and articulated that the feedback was meant to support each other, and to "help us analyze our own graphs." When the teacher called the class together, she asked them to record one sentence that reflects an exemplary characteristic of a Level 3 analytical statement, and to record it on a post-it. She collected the post-its. In the second class, the station rotation completed, students were at varying places in outlining ideas to incorporate into their paragraphs. As the teacher checked in with students, she asked questions such as "What does that tell us?" At no time did she provide answers, and students conferred with each other as they prepared outlines. The teacher brought the class together to note a group who were using the sentence starters provided to remind others that this was a good starting point. In both lessons, it was clear that students were familiar with collaborative work and work product expectations. Additionally, the set of activities invited students to recognize for themselves what exemplary work looks like, and determine the criteria.
- In a social studies class, as an entry into studying symbolism in Greek myths, students first discussed the significance of "Turkish Delight" in *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*. The teacher called on students who offered, "a taste of things to come", "self-control", and "Edmund's greed." A student added that his greed was creating a hole in his stomach. This provided an entry point for students to make inferences about symbolism in Greek mythology. Students were then grouped based on inferencing skill, and had a choice of the original or a modified version of the myth. The lesson plan indicated the students who would need modified text. Similarly, to ready students for peer-editing of writing that had gone through several drafts, the teacher set up stations to address specific skills that surfaced as areas of need such as "dialogue alley", "word spice stand" and "mechanic shop." Students delved into paired discussions of their writing pieces, and identified the feedback they wanted such as improving dialogue, or building a better context for a character in distress. Students were familiar with this process and engaged in robust discussions.
- In a science class students worked in groups to determine a method for collecting the most accurate data from microbes grown in a petri dish. The focus was on students' processes and decisions as they readily engaged in the task. One group color-coded their data to make it clearer to see, and two groups placed the dish over the graph. Students understood where this experiment was leading, as one student noted, "we learn through testing, if more microbes were in cell phones or the Chromebook." All students owned their learning, and equitably contributed to discussion.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across all classrooms teachers create assessments and rubrics aligned to curricula that reflect a clear portrait of student mastery, and teacher’s assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Students receive consistent actionable and meaningful feedback on their achievement, and teachers make adjustments to their practice so that students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are offered many opportunities to reflect on their learning and to plan and understand their next steps. For example, students maintain assessment notebooks where they assess their understanding of project learning targets, record the rationale for their assessment, and reflect on prompts such as “What evidence do you have that shows how you can analyze artifacts and archaeological features to inform your understanding of hunter-gatherer life?” For example, one student reflected on the necessary skills for achieving mastery on her essay, “I had to understand how an author’s perspective impacts a character’s perspective, how an author develops a fascinating character, and how analyzing evidence contributes to my thesis.” This set of skills helped her to reach the long-term learning target relative to character analysis. A second student realized that he had not reached mastery on the learning target regarding the caste system and its effect on society, “I deserve a 2.5 because I could not find enough details to support my claim. I can write the gist, but I have not reached mastery on this learning target.”
- All teachers use a formative assessment tracker to check for understanding and to adjust instruction to support students. For example, after a science teacher reviewed her students’ testable questions prior to them conducting an investigation into cells, she adjusted her lesson by creating a video station so that students could develop criteria and revise their Level 2 questions to Level 3. The teacher worked with a small group of students who earned a one on their questions to review criteria. As a result, all but three students earned a Level 3 on their revised questions.
- Students receive actionable and meaningful feedback from teachers and peers throughout multi-layered project assessments. For example, in an essay for which a student wrote about monomyths in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the teacher recognized the strengths in analysis of text evidence, and posed a question “Why do we cross the threshold without refusal or a mentor?” One student shared that students peer-edit each other’s work for every project in every class. “We do this to see our strengths and weaknesses, and we know what we need to do to get to the next level.” She added that in several classes students contribute to rubric criteria, which helps “us to understand the rubric better.”
- Students are provided with struggle time in math class because “The teacher wants us to attempt to solve a problem without fully knowing how to.” This was in evidence in two math classes where the teachers circulated, asked probing questions, and brought the class together to redirect students’ focus or to collect students’ exemplary math statements to assess understanding. One teacher noted that initially this was hard for students who wanted to “stick with procedure, but over time we have been able to extend struggle time.” This resulted in all students moving from a Level 2 to a Level 3 in dividing fractions.