



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

M.S. 137 America's School of Heroes

Middle School Q137

**109-15 98th Street
Queens
NY 11417**

Principal: Laura Mastrogiovanni

**Date of review: January 7, 2016
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

The School Context

M.S. 137 America's School of Heroes is a middle school with 1,892 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 5% Black, 32% Hispanic, 2% White, and 54% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.5%.

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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for all students across grades, including those they do not teach directly. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership.

Impact

Improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students is achieved through these teacher team practices. Distributed leadership results in teachers playing an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- At a Grade 7 English Language Arts team meeting teachers discussed a previously administered unit four performance task reflecting on their students' ability to compare and contrast strategies that authors use to show cause and effect relationships. The teacher facilitator asked "What mini lessons could we identify to support increased student understanding?" One teacher shared her colleague's practice of having students move to prepared work stations where they had to identify if the answer provided on the work sheet was correct or incorrect. She noted the task was created specifically for English as a New Learner classes (ENL). However the teacher shared that the practice is easily transferrable and she would be more than willing to share the lesson plan. Additional mini lessons suggested to be used included the use of Brainpop, an online video resource, flowcab a vocabulary website, and asking the building staff if they would agree to be interviewed.
- First year teachers and veteran teachers who have new grade assignments communicated that the inquiry team protocol being utilized has positively impacted their instructional practices. They shared that they are more aware of the lateral movement of curriculum, and "we now plan backwards and unwrap the standards and share what doesn't work, because we know what the students have struggled with." This awareness has led to curricular adjustments in what the teachers call the school's "living document curriculum maps." For example, a revision was made to a lesson plan related to identifying the causes and effects of the Salem Witch Trial of 1692. Following an inquiry discussion, students were strategically given leveled readings and a group presentation with individually assigned roles and a rubric. Students achieved increased mastery based on information provided by the teachers.
- The teachers, along with the building leadership, have established a mutual culture of weekly inter-visitations. Teachers volunteer and are requested to share their best practices with their colleagues who will visit their classroom and use an established protocol. Teachers note the specific focus of the inter-visitation, what they observed that relates to the focus, and what strategies or routines will support their implementation in their instruction. As a result of these peer to peer visits staff shared they are using such practices as putting more strategic planning into grouping, using plickers, a digital form of assessment, and providing students with more opportunities for collaboration.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and provide opportunities for all students to access the curricula.

Impact

Student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation as they engage in appropriate tasks although opportunities for high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula were not fully observed for all learners, especially students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Group work and teacher leader roles are purposefully built into many lessons so students can demonstrate increased engagement through discussion. Students shared that they regularly work in groups because “it helps us to better understand.” A group activity observed in an English Language Arts class consisted of students conducting a gallery walk which required their interpreting a picture with sentence starters or quotes. In a math class students were expected to review their answer with a partner after being directed to think, pair, and share. In a social studies class students were engaged in a Socratic seminar on the Indian caste system. Students assumed the role of facilitator and mediated the discussion themselves. However, in several of the classrooms where students were in small groups, especially those identified as students with disabilities, the discussion was directly between them and the teacher. Additionally, the use of teacher leaders was not observed in a manner where students assumed full ownership of the role.
- In a co-taught ENL class students worked in small groups and were provided opportunities to engage in a discussion focused on the duty we have to preserve world wonders for future generations. Students were assigned different texts to use based on their reading, writing, and speaking abilities. Students appeared enthusiastic in their review of the documents and were supported by the teacher’s individual attention. Dictionaries were provided to support students if necessary. Students actively underlined the text and took notes based on teacher feedback. This purposeful attention to providing supports throughout instruction was not as apparent in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, thus limiting all students from engaging in highly challenging tasks.
- In a majority of classes observed, teachers provided students with directions about how to proceed through small group work, discussions, or tasks assigned. In a grade 8 math class, students were directed to work on a station task together and share their understanding of why the answer was correct or incorrect. Most answered accordingly, although with little critical follow-up. During a technology lesson, students who finished their calculations were directed to engage in an interactive online battle that varied with facts and computations; this provided students with high levels of thinking and self-assessment. However, during a math ICT class, students were assigned a task consisting of completing a graphic organizer that was mostly filled-in for them already. Furthermore, confusing directions were provided orally during group work such that students appeared unclear of the process.

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 Common Core Learning Standards and content standards that strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks in a coherent way.

Impact

The school planning documents demonstrate coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration and staff strongly support a curriculum grounded in a balanced literacy approach. A review of lesson planning documents showcased the integration of the instructional shifts through fiction and non-fiction reading and including word problems in math classes. A geology co-teaching lesson plan asks students “What are the causes of natural disasters?” Students are expected to analyze a non-fiction text and cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text explicitly states about hurricanes as well as draw inferences from the text to further explain how a hurricane forms. In a math class, students were provided a scenario with several graphs allowing them to make connections between the text and graphs at one of four stations. Each station required students to read a brief passage before answering the question. In an English as a New Language lesson plan, students were assigned one of four readings about wonders of the world and expected to complete a graphic organizer using the information provided in the text.
- Including academic vocabulary in all lesson plans is one of the goals for this school year. A review of documents includes a specific section dedicated to the identification of the vocabulary and how it will be incorporated into the lesson. For example, in one lesson plan a “Word of the Day” section included the synonyms, a sentence example, and an explanation of the word reluctant. How the word would be tied into the lesson discussion when the students read *The Dairy of Anne Frank* was included as well. In a science lesson plan, students were to explain the differences between radio waves, visible light, and gamma rays. Additionally, they had to apply this knowledge to understanding the definition of a “wave” as it is used in the scientific sense. In a health lesson for students with disabilities, students were expected to discuss the term peer pressure within small groups and define peer pressure in their own words. They are further challenged to provide evidence regarding why they think teens are so susceptible to the influence of their friends and classmates in the real world.
- Rigorous habits are built into each lesson through the maximizing of instructional time through the Do Now and the lesson summary. All lesson planning documents include these elements so students are made aware of what they have learned during the daily lesson. Real life transferrable applications are included with the Do Now and lesson summary as well. For example during a Socratic seminar summary students share out what went well and what can be improved on for the next seminar. In a math lesson students match a story with a graph, and in an English language arts class students are required to provide one response they agree with and one they disagree with based on the day’s lesson.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, track progress, and adjust curricula.

Impact

Actionable and meaningful feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Decisions are made so that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Saturday academy courses are offered to students in math and English language arts to reinforce skills. Targeted groups of students are invited to attend based on data from state assessment exams. Teachers work with students who scored below a 2.06 on the New York State English language arts assessment and below a 2.03 on the New York State math assessments as well as our current English language learners. Additionally, a student articulation sheet tracks progress regarding student's strengths and challenges from the Saturday classes which are shared with the core instructional teacher, Academic Intervention Services (AIS) teacher and discussed during the inquiry meeting time.
- Unit assessments are created and maintained in all core content classes using the Data Driven Classroom (DDC) a system which the school acquired. Teachers use the system to track student progress and identify questions that gave students the most difficulty with immediate feedback. Item analysis reports by standard are then used to identify areas of strengths and weakness. Using that data mini-lessons are developed to target observed trends. An instructional expectation, such as, a problem of the day in math or a gallery walk in science leads to clear growth in student achievement. Student growth percentile forms from post assessments show significant growth of students moving up from lower-levels, including an increased number of students achieving mastery.
- Students shared they use rubrics extensively and create their own in some classes to "score ourselves". They understood that feedback was provided to understand what they need to do in order to improve. Additionally, portfolio reflection sheets are used in classes to allow students the opportunity to paraphrase their teacher's feedback and state in their own words what they did well and what they could improve on with their next assignment. One student shared the checklist they used to guide their writing and help them fully understand what was necessary to achieve mastery on the assignment. It also included an opportunity to share their understanding with a partner and to comment on what is required to perform at a high level.
- Individual conference forms are maintained for all English language learners by the English as New Language teacher in each class. The conference forms track student progress and offer targeted strategies to facilitate achievement. This information is also used to group students together and record the quality of work and participation. Documents reflect strategies such as to pre-teach important vocabulary words so the student can comprehend the text at an appropriate reading level to ensure success.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear, focused, and effective feedback.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability exists which support high expectations among staff which ensures that students, including high-need subgroups, own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are communicated to all students through a variety of approaches including building postings, staff reminders, and pamphlets. Students understand they are to come prepared to learn. Students shared that the teachers want us to be mindful of our grades and present ourselves well. Morning announcements are led by students reading the pledge, the school mission statement, and the school motto, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." Students are informed in the sixth grade that they will take a foreign language in all grades and two Regents exams one in mathematics and one in science before they move onto high school.
- Administration provides an English language arts question bank from Engage NY as a guide for teachers to use when planning lessons. The question bank includes each standard by grade and a list of questions from previous tests to support teacher's development of standard-based assessments and ensure alignment to the curriculum.
- A reading of teachers' Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) evaluation forms revealed that several teachers identified as Highly Effective also received actionable feedback to support and extend their pedagogy. Examples of recommendations included statements such; "In the future, it is imperative that you have activities preplanned for newcomers, students that may be admitted on any day during the year." As a 'Model Teacher,' please continue to log all teachers that inter-visit your classroom and their focus for instruction." Additional feedback included; ""As you know, our instructional focus for this school year is..." and "you should share and incorporate the material from our recent Monday professional development where annotation was the focus." Teachers shared that the team cohesion within the building allows them to "get together, share best practices, and use data to understand what is working day to day and year to year."
- Expectations are equalized for all students as evidenced through inter-visitation feedback forms which indicate a teacher's observation of high engagement and conversation among the various student populations and subgroups. Teachers shared that students are more actively engaged and able to relate to their knowledge and express their understanding of content. The students stated they are aware of their expectations because they regularly set goals and have opportunities to meet with their advisor regarding future planning and life skills. Students also shared they enjoy being given opportunities for electives where they can "develop skills that can be applied to the real world." Additionally, all the students spoken to shared they have a really good guidance counselor that familiarizes them with high school options and ensures they understand to be mindful of selecting high schools appropriately, and not to "follow your friends."