



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

J.H.S. 144 Michelangelo

Middle School X144

**2545 Gunther Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469**

Principal: Ellen Barrett

**Date of review: January 27, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

J.H.S. 144 Michelangelo is a Middle School with 487 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 65% Black, 29% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 28% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.1%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills are coherently embedded across grades and subjects.

Impact

Common Core-aligned curriculum and rigorous tasks ensure that all students including English Language Learners and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) consistently demonstrate their thinking and are prepared for career and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- A grade 7 social studies unit 5, Life in the New Nation, is aligned to the New York City Social Studies Scope and Sequence. Among the objectives of this unit were the understanding of the shift from an agrarian to an industrial culture and understanding how the principals of economics affected the early American nation. Additionally, this unit requires students to understand content area vocabulary, text structure and to use literal, inferential and analytical references in order to draft an argumentative, document-based essay. This unit referenced scaffolds such as using Google translate, bilingual dictionaries and vocabulary Pictionary, as well as small group supports to hold English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with IEPs accountable to the same standards.
- A grade 8 science unit shows that students will be studying density and matter. As a result of this, students will be engaged in a lab activity where they will conduct experiments on analyzing information and draw conclusions to determine the density of materials. Students then participate in a performance task where they will have to create tables listing the density of various materials and rank these from least to most dense. Finally, the students will have to write an essay on density and how density can be changed. This will be tied to the overarching question of “Why are the effects of density important for the workings of the universe and for our daily lives?”
- As a result of the June state exams, the school leaders realized that in English Language Arts (ELA) two standards, citing textual evidence to support analysis and determining the central idea of text and analyzing its development, had the lowest score across all grades. As a result, school leaders embedded these standards in all of their upcoming units across grades and adjusted their performance and culminating tasks to reflect these standards. Similarly, in math the lowest scores were in interpreting and computing quotients of fractions. Therefore, this was strategically placed into the curriculum units and spiraled throughout other units.
- The school has placed a focus on argumentative writing and this type of writing is embedded in all grades and in all subjects, including math for short and extended responses. Students are required to introduce a topic or claim and to organize evidence logically. Students must show logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the curricula. Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress.

Impact

In some cases, misaligned rubrics prevent teachers and students from gaining a clear picture of student mastery. While data from common assessments inform adjustments to curricula and instruction, this has not yet led to all students showing increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics and checklists were observed in most classrooms visited and students used these to guide their work as well as to engage other students in conversations about the work. Students were observed using a student reading self-assessment checklist aligned to the school's belief of reciprocal teaching. This checklist focused on predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing for discussion. Three types of assessments were observed on this performance task rubric for student work. One was the student self-reflection, another was peer feedback, and finally teacher feedback of "Details given show that you grasped the concept. Your writing is clear and coherent".
- Many of the school rubrics are based on the ELA curriculum; however, this offers limited feedback to Regents bound students who need feedback on concept-specific material. For example, one 8-week science unit requires students to know traits about the cells of different organisms and how they impact characteristics of adaptation of the species, including normal and abnormal cell division leading to cancer. The associated rubric with its ELA base measures organization, use of literary supports, and language and conventions. It does not measure such concepts as understanding the role of probability in heredity, or understanding the process that meiosis and mitosis plays in cell division, thus offering limited feedback to student and providing teachers with limited information on student achievement for adjustments in science.
- Students in student meetings spoke about the school's common assessments and the feedback that they received on these assessments as benchmarks for how well they were performing in the school. A few students spoke about performance tasks and culminating tasks and the rigorous work that they did to prepare for these exams. Students spoke about the pre-unit exam which was an argumentative essay, and how as a result of low scores on this pre-assessment teachers deliberately taught a mnemonic RAQQE (Restate. Answer. Quote. Quote. Explain.). Students stated that they all had improved scores. All students then stated that providing site-based evidence in the performance and culminating tasks is essential and the most important of all is to explain the quote. Students all agreed that this strategy has helped improve their writing and their scores on common assessments. However, assessment practices such as these are not yet applied consistently across the school, missing opportunities to make effective adjustments across all content areas.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations including elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to college and career readiness to parents.

Impact

As a result, there is a system of accountability in place for staff, and parents are aware of their student's progress towards meeting those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have set up an internal Google Drive that houses all communication to teachers as well as teacher team minutes and protocols, professional development, curriculum, and school data. Teachers look at their data and set professional goals including professional development. Teachers who have been rated highly effective in certain areas of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* have received training on facilitation skills and provide professional development and intervisitations to other teachers to improve pedagogy as part of the inquiry process. School leaders observe teachers formally and informally through Danielson observation and instructional rounds.
- School leaders have created an atmosphere of scholarship where students are aware of the high expectations for student success. Parents spoke about the school honor roll and the specialized College and Careers Honors Program where students must maintain an 85 average in all core subjects. Parents feel that the school has created a competitive scholastic environment that pushes student thinking. Parents spoke about positive phone calls from teachers that focused on student performance not just behaviors. Parents also stated that they were struggling with Common Core math and as a result the school provided workshops on this. Some parents spoke about how the school deliberately prepares their children for high school by suggesting that students join the debate team or band so that they can develop skills and become the well-rounded students that high schools want to recruit.
- Parents feel that the school provides student with rigorous work and students have been trained to think critically. They stated that the students are expected to do a great deal of reading, analyzing and writing and they feel that these skills are essential for both career and college. Parents stated the school has taken students on trips to colleges. Parents state that there is transparency in student achievement through Skedula and Pupil Path and they can follow their students' grades and progress. They state that both the parent coordinator and teachers are extremely helpful and that teachers have returned emails as late as 1 am. Parents state that there is high visibility and communication with school leaders who are readily accessible to parents. They shared that they and their student are known personally and the school makes every effort to keep parents apprised of curriculum, expectations, student performance and preparing for high school and beyond.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teacher ensure that scaffolds are in place so that all students can demonstrate their thinking and be engaged in high levels of discussion. Although all classes had high levels of discussion, there is not yet student ownership across the vast majority of classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Scaffolds and multiple entry points into lessons were observed in most of the classrooms, supporting all students to demonstrate their thinking. For example, in a grade 8 science class, students were reading, annotating and collecting evidence on the transference of germs on surfaces from sneezing. While at first glance, students appeared to be reading the same article and working on the same worksheets, a closer look revealed that the articles were at different Lexile levels. Additionally, the worksheets were differentiated to include more inferential questions or more concrete questions. Some also included sentence stems so that students who struggled with language or needed additional supports would know how to begin to frame their answer. In addition, students worked together in mixed-ability groups, thus ensuring that all students were getting the same exposure and rigor.
- Supports for rigorous, independent thinking and student discussion could be seen in most classrooms. For example, in a grade 6 math classroom students sat at strategy-based math stations with differentiated worksheets, timers, manipulatives, graphic organizers and checklist cards to guide the task. Students worked on multiplying decimals, math sentences and graphing. One student sat with the teacher who wanted the student to provide a rationalization for the answer she had just computed. The student only spoke French, however the teacher used Google Translate and some math accountable talk stems to ensure that the student was able to explain her answer. All students were engaged in math discussions with their partners and explained their rationale for their answers.
- High levels of conversations were apparent in most of the classrooms. For example, in a grade 7 ELA class, students were very animated while discussing Julia Alvarez's poem, *I, too, sing America*. Students were engaged in a text-based conversation, citing lines and stanzas and making connections between the literary elements in the poem and the author's life. In two groups students made the connection between the author's body and the South American continent. A student stated, "Tierra del Fuego is at the bottom of South America and the author says that she is grounded by the soles of her feet." Similarly, in a social studies class, students were discussing the idea of graffiti. Students looked at the before and after pictures of an abandoned building that was covered in graffiti then whitewashed to prepare it for being sold. Students debated points such as, "Painting the building white destroyed all the art" and "What is the definition of art? Do you have a right to graffiti private property?" However, while most students are successfully engaging in procedural, structured discussions, this level of ownership was not seen in the majority of classes.

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity.

Impact

The school has developed a collaborative culture of professional learning where teachers feel empowered to make decisions that improve student learning and strengthen teacher instructional practice.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers in the school are members of a teacher team and help drive the work of the school in many ways. There are 4 major kinds of teacher teams in the school that promote instruction. The school has teachers who are Peer Instructional Coaches, Learning Partners Teachers who host other schools interested in the school's practices, Team Leads for the grades and content and finally an Inquiry Teacher Team. These various teams have a voice in identifying strong practices at the school related to pedagogy, the use of assessments, data trends and making curricular and instructional adjustment to meet identified gaps. The teams work on creating coherence at the school through cycles of inquiry and intervistations that include low inference observations and a critical friend review.
- Teacher teams meet using a protocol where one teacher presents his or her work to their colleagues who help analyze the student work for implications for both students and teacher. For example, in one teacher team meeting attended, the teachers were analyzing work that involved multiplying two digit numbers by two digit numbers. One teacher asked the presenting teacher what her expectations for the unit were and what she considered mastery for the task. Teachers then predicted common misconceptions for the work before analyzing the student work. They listed out the student difficulties and began to list out scaffolds to support students such as strategy charts and using graph paper and two different colors when multiplying. The presenting teacher reflected on her work and selected a strategy to implement. This math team shared that in unit 4 on grade 6 this approach increased student achievement from 40% to 51%.
- Teachers stated inquiry not only results in curricular modifications, but also strengthens teacher practice. Once teachers develop a hypothesis about student misconceptions, the presenting teacher adopts a strategy for the skill or lesson and invites other teachers in the class to see that skill or strategy used on the identified area of needs. The visiting teachers take low inference observations and provide the presenting teacher with feedback on the skill or lesson. If that strategy or skill is a successful one, it is adopted by all teachers teaching that same lesson or skill. This leads to improved teacher practice for all teachers. Additionally, teachers state that they learn from students. One teacher stated, "Sometimes you learn a new strategy from students, just by looking at student work. I remember the time that all six graders came in and their approach was to use the lattice method for solving all problems. We saw that this year's incoming student did not learn lattice as a problem solving technique. We will teach it now." This practice has yielded an overall 20% gain in many post-test scores.