



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

M.S. 180 Dr. Daniel Hale Williams

Middle School X180

**700 Baychester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10475**

Principal: Frank Uzzo

**Date of review: January 20, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

M.S. 180 Dr. Daniel Hale Williams is a middle school with 879 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 69% Black, 23% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 1% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.0%.

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	Proficient
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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff establish a culture for learning in which high expectations are consistently communicated to students and families. School leaders and staff offer ongoing feedback to help families understand student progress toward those expectations.

Impact

Students are prepared for the next level and parents are supported in understanding expectations for college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school offers the Physical Setting/Earth Science Regents exam and the Spanish Proficiency exam. These classes provide students with an opportunity for exposure to high school level classes and to earn high school credits.
- Parents feel that the school does an excellent job communicating information about student achievement through Engrade and Class Dojo. They report that these communication systems, in addition to a Weebly page on the school website, allow them to see real time information on their students. Parents stated that there are various curriculum nights and open houses to inform parents about curriculum and instruction. Overall parents felt that the school provides the most support for student achievement through a progress report system called “possible failure notice” which provides parent with an early warning on academic failure. After receipt of this notice, parents to come to school and participate in an academic intervention conference with the teacher and student. They develop a plan of support to improve student academic performance before the final grade is given. Parents state that this conferencing system has a positive impact on student responsibility and achievement, resulting in improved academic behavior.
- As the school is an arts school all students are immersed in the arts and there is a focus on fine arts, performing arts and media. Parents stated that many of their students have applied to schools that require a portfolio or an audition as part of its admission process. Parents stated that the school provides students with a great deal of support to ensure that students are admitted to these specialized high schools. Teachers rehearse and refine auditions in dance, acting and in music, as well as help students select, critique and speak about media and fine arts pieces so that they are successful in the high school interview. Parents feel that this focus has created a greater understanding in both their students and themselves with regard to high school and career expectations if their student decides to pursue a career in the arts.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics aligned with the school's curricula, to provide actionable feedback to students. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas and to inform adjustments to curricula and instruction.

Impact

Though work across grades and subjects is supported with rubrics, in some cases misaligned rubrics provide limited content area feedback, thus missing an opportunity for meaningful feedback and a clear portrait of student mastery in content area disciplines.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use and create pre- and post-assessments aligned to performance tasks such as the Critical Lens Essay in grade 8 to inform adjustments to instruction to meet student needs. School leaders also use *Ready New York CCLS* as a quarterly benchmark to ensure that their school-designed curriculum is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and that all the standards are covered.
- A recent adjustment that the school made was to move unit 2 in grade 7 math from November to October to extend student exposure to ratios and proportions as a result of looking at performance in the June state exam scores. Similarly, data from pre-and post-assessments on a science unit focusing on AIDS led to the decision to re-sequence its science curriculum to begin with studying the human body so that students would have a context and background to understand the immune system leading to students demonstrating better understanding during the health unit.
- Bulletin boards and student work samples across the school demonstrate the school-wide use of rubrics to provide students with feedback. In grade 8 students are expected to write a critical lens essay that mimics the grade 11 critical lens English Regents essay. Students receive rubric aligned feedback through Critical Lens Regents rubric. The alignment of task to rubric allows students to receive targeted feedback related to the component being measured for example, "Your essay is well-organized, formal in tone and a thorough analysis with insightful interpretations." However, using an English Language Arts (ELA), non-fiction rubric in both science and social studies, does not provide students with feedback on mastery of content skills and hinders demonstration of student mastery of content area knowledge. For example, a unit on how body systems rely on interdependence to support homeostasis used an ELA rubric that focused on "organization" and "creativity" rather than measuring understanding of content concepts such as demonstrating an understanding the functions and relationships of organs there by limiting students' ability to focus on and demonstrate content mastery in science or social studies.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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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

While the belief that student learn best when engaged in high-level conversations based on authentic texts was present in all classes, this practice did not always result in close reading and direct citations, thus limiting the opportunity for student ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- While in some classrooms students are actively encouraged to return to the text to select evidence, explain their rational or discuss nuances or bias in the text, this is not a consistent practice across classrooms. For example, in a Socratic Seminar on immigration, students spoke about how immigrants may participate in deception to remain in this country. Students argued back and forth mentioning the article they read as evidence, and provided surface answers. They did not cite the text directly or lift language from the text as support. This resulted in student repeating same point without developing it or discussing any underlining bias. Only 1 student asked the class to open their article on *The Dream Act* because she wanted the class to discuss the language of the article. Similarly, in another ELA class, students reading Cisneros's *Eleven* had to answer the question, "Do you agree with Rachel when she says that the way you grow old is like an onion?" Students were unsure as how to answer the question and said it did not make sense. Students did not go back to the text to close read. When asked what the text stated explicitly, the student hesitantly went back to the text and read it aloud. Upon reading the text, she jumped up, saying, "I got it now" and she was able to engage her peers in conversation pointing out how the author spoke about nesting dolls and those are similar to the layers of onions. However, this did not result in examination of the text or meaning beyond what it explicitly stated.
- In a math class on ratios and proportion, the teacher spoke about speeding tickets explaining to the students that there was a flat rate of \$55 a speeding ticket for a certain state with a \$5 charge for every mile over the speed limit. She provided students with similar problems from various states. The students had to convert these word problems into logarithms. In alignment with the school belief that students learn best through discussion, the teacher had the students explore the concepts of flat rate as the constant in the formula and the ticket as the variable based on the speed limit plus an unknown in small groups using a think, pair, and share strategy.
- A review of the student work from the critical lens essays reveal a literary analysis and a deep understanding of literary elements in the novel *Speak*. For example one essay read, the "tree is a big metaphor" and it "is a metaphor for the brokenness that Melinda is experiencing. She feels her depictions like dead trees, are a metaphor for the death of her innocence." Another essay comparing *Speak* to a work from Nietzsche read, "When Melinda is holding a broken mirror to Andy Evan's throat this is ironic because the mirror represents Melinda's self-image which in the book was poor." She compares Andy hurting Melissa with Nietzsche's idea that "man does despicable things that ruin beautiful things on the earth."

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and make purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work.

Impact

As a result, students are immersed in rigorous curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core and focuses on critical thinking and preparing students for career and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has created their own ELA curriculum and has aligned it with the social studies curriculum through the use of nonfiction texts. A grade 8 unit examining the essential question of “How do we make our voices heard in a democratic society?” develops argument writing in ELA and social studies by asking students to determine the central idea of a text, analyze its development over the course of the text, and provide its relationships to the supporting ideas. Students determine the author’s point of view and analyze conflicting evidence through research. Students delineate and evaluate arguments and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reason is sound and if the evidence is relevant and sufficient. They also learn to refute counter arguments to strengthen their claims.
- As a result of looking at grade 7 test scores on both the state exam and their own pre- and post-assessments, teachers realized that more time was needed to cover the unit on ratio and proportion to increase student understanding and achievement. Teachers and administrators decided to change the scope and sequence for teaching this unit. While New York State Standard lists number sense after ratios, number sense is now taught first as a basis for ratios. The unit has also been extended by 10 days and moved to the beginning of October instead of November to ensure that there is additional time to teach the subject thoroughly and provide additional re-teach time and intervention to students who require it.
- The school has a 3-year sequence in ELA focused on college and career discovery. In each grade students participating in this interdisciplinary class are immersed in research and explore career choices, appropriate work skills and behaviors, the use of technology, personal interests and strengths, college exploration, SAT skills, resume writing, cover letters, and college essay writing. Over the course of 3 years students work on improving coherence in writing, word choice, and communicating ideas clearly with organization in both oral and written form.
- Performance on state exams indicated a need to focus on symbolism. As a result teachers developed a grade 8 unit modeled after the grade 11 English Regents. This unit, *Critical Lens*, prepares students to evaluate novels and write a literary analysis on a central theme.
- The school has a robust fine arts, visual arts and performing arts curriculum aligned to the *New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Arts* standards. All students in this school participate in the arts throughout their 3 years in this school.

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 that promotes the achievement of school goals and strengthens teacher instructional capacity. Teacher teams consistently analyze data for students they share resulting in improved teacher practice and student progress.

Impact

Teachers consistently collaborate to learn from student work and reflect on their practice. Teachers use this reflection and observation to tailor lessons and units and to improve teacher work leading to increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- In a teacher team meeting, ELA teachers were analyzing the results of a narrative essay on the novel *Speak*. This essay is required students to identify a central idea, think critically about the author’s use of craft, and analyze figurative language. They noted that while historically students struggled with inference in understanding of the use of symbolism, this recent sample of work demonstrated a strong and clear understanding of symbolism. Teachers were able to identify the additional lessons that they had embedded in this unit that ensured student success in understanding symbolism. As they discussed the essays, one teacher suggested that each teacher collect samples of work at each level that they would use as student models for the next year’s students to analyze and use as patterns.
- In a teacher team, a teacher spoke about how this was her first year teaching an Integrated Co-Teaching class and shared that as a result of looking at the critical lens essay work in inquiry, she modified her lessons to provide students with quotes or very short stories to analyze as practice and modeling. As a result of this scaffold, there has been a 65% improvement in her post-unit scores on analysis as compared to her pre-unit scores.
- A conversation with a teacher team comprised of instructional leads and grade members surfaced that there are multiple teams at the school including content area, grade level and vertical teacher teams all structured around inquiry. These teams are engaged in analyzing both academic and social emotional data and making the required adjustments to instruction, providing intervention or surveying teacher needs and planning professional development to strengthen teacher practice.
- A review of notes from the grade 8 special education math team meeting on the unit 2 expression and equation pre-test shows that student work was analyzed after the school made the decision to re-order this unit on its curriculum timeline by placing it earlier in the year as suggested by the teacher team. The findings of this pre-test showed that students still struggled with equations and variables, and listed clear next steps for student instruction such as creating lessons that identified how to find solutions for a system of equations, how to solve a system of equations algebraically, and systems of equations with no solutions. A look at the post-unit exams reveals that student performed much better and in many cases doubled their pre-test scores.