



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School

Middle School X286

**1001 Jennings Street
Bronx
NY 10460**

Principal: Lorraine Chanon

**Date of review: March 10, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart**

The School Context

Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School is a middle school with 268 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 26% Black, 71% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 16% English Language Learners and 25% students with disabilities. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.4%.

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	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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Within and across grades, teachers regularly examine their practice, assessment data, and student work in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Embedded structures foster distributed leadership.

Impact

There are shared improvements in teaching practices and mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers play an integral role in key instructional decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet often in a variety of teams and participate in study groups on topics such as assessment and developing cognitively engaging tasks. Cross-grade teams work with content coaches looking at student work and identifying problems of practice. Grade-level teams gather data and look at student work to determine if lessons were effective. Teachers on one team were observed analyzing an interim assessment to determine the impact of their prior instruction in using text-based evidence. They noted that many students were now using direct quotes effectively and that the work of one of their focus students showed she was able to cite the text to “talk about the setting.” Team members decided that in upcoming lessons in all content areas they would provide models on the use of transition stems and have students use the rubrics when giving peer feedback. One teacher suggested they could use more “debatable” questions to deepen student discussion.
- Teacher teams conduct cycles of inquiry that begin with the analysis of assessment and performance data. They then outline instructional interventions and proceed to review and self-reflection. A literacy teacher team reviewed data from an assessment on the reading standard dealing with citing textual evidence and found that the percent of students exceeding the standard improved from 6% in the fall to 25% in the winter. The team members determined they would focus on the standard addressing summarizing the text in future units.
- When teachers determined that they wanted to accelerate improvement in student learning, they decided to share videos of their classroom lessons with their study group members. Teachers report that the practice of sharing and learning from each other has led them to take charge of their own professional learning as they implement new pedagogical strategies, such as the use of fishbowl discussions and individual conferencing techniques. These practices support the continued improvement in student achievement that is indicated by the percent of grade 7 students passing the State math exam increasing from 15% in 2013 to 38% in 2015, and in grade 8, from 41% to 53%.
- Professional development (PD) activities are often facilitated by teachers. School leaders identify topics for PD, taking into account the needs and expertise of individual staff members. Teachers noted that there is no “one-size-fits-all PD.” Teachers are also empowered to make decisions and use the time when they meet in teams to ensure the school maintains focus on student achievement.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

In most, but not all, classrooms, teaching strategies provide multiple entry points for students with differing learning styles. Most students produce work that reflects high levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

While most students are engaged in challenging tasks, not all student discussions and work products reflect ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In one Integrated Co-Teaching class, students were grouped based on their performance on a previous assessment and worked on translating word problems into mathematical expressions and equations. One group had the assistance of a graphic illustration of math symbols and a glossary of associated key words. In another class, students were strategically divided into reading groups according to the most recent results of the Degrees of Reading Power assessment. The teacher assigned students to heterogeneous groups so that students reading at or above grade level had the responsibility to summarize the group work and students approaching grade level were assigned to push the group by asking, "What else are you wondering about?" Students with lower reading levels were assigned to predict what might happen in the text. This level of differentiation was not present in every class that was observed.
- In order to ensure that all students are challenged to engage in meaningful tasks and share their thinking with the whole class, many teachers call on students by selecting Popsicle sticks individualized with student names and coded to identify students who are not making expected progress. This method ensures that all students, including those who are struggling, have regular opportunities to demonstrate their learning.
- In a math class, students consulted with partners to explain how they had calculated the value of "b" in the expression " $9b+3 = 21$." However, not all students were able to explain their calculation strategy and a few students discussed solutions that were incorrect, without being pushed by their peers or the teacher to check their answer.
- Students engage in weekly debates requiring them to use learned vocabulary as part of a regular cycle of instructional activities with a focus on academic vocabulary. One social studies class prepared to debate the age at which a person should be considered an adult. A student claimed, "I think there should be one age to do everything," citing age 18 as old enough to vote and serve in the military as supporting evidence. A student with an opposing view claimed that 18 year-olds are not mature enough to drink alcohol and cited stories of automobile accidents among drinking teens as supporting evidence.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills and are refined using student work and data.

Impact

All learners have access to the curricula through tasks that are cognitively engaging.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal and school leaders have focused instruction on “reading, speaking, and writing about text in every class, every day.” This consistent focus is in place in all content areas and extends to advisory curriculum tasks requiring students to write using claims and evidence as they do in their academic courses. A unit plan on the topic of climate and biomes includes lessons on how to state a conclusion and support it with specific evidence. A lesson in this unit illustrates how to provide strong evidence to support a claim that it is cold outside distinguishing an opinion such as, “It feels that way to me” as weak supporting evidence and the statement, “It is 28 degrees outside” as an example of strong evidence. A grade 7 portfolio assignment requires students to identify the roles citizens play in a democracy. A grade 6 math task requires students to provide a visual model of a word problem, answer questions involving calculations, and then to explain and justify the strategy they used to solve the problem.
- Teachers refine lessons and tasks adopted from *Expeditionary Learning*, *Odell* and *EngageNY* by creating resources to strengthen the alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards with the specific needs of their students in mind. For example, one team discussed how the exit ticket dealing with symbolism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, didn’t match the learning objective, which was about how dialogue reveals aspects of a character. They determined that the lesson objective would be strengthened with a closing activity about processing dialogue. Two teachers collaborated on revising the lesson after having taught it to two classes before they taught it to a third class. The closing activity of the lesson was revised to ask students to identify a piece of dialogue and to write on what it revealed about the character.
- All lesson plans from classroom visits reference the standards the lesson will address and include learning targets, such as “I can determine whether two expressions are equivalent” and “I can make and support a global claim.” The lesson plans also itemize what the teacher will look for in student understanding. For example, a science lesson plan indicates that the teacher will look for how well students use the following academic and science content vocabulary words: biome, habitat, clarify, refute.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers create assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula and assessment practices include frequent checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers provide actionable feedback to students and make effective adjustments to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Progress reports, which are translated into Spanish as needed, give students information about how well they are performing on work habits and practice, standards mastery, and portfolio mastery. On one progress report, a teacher noted that the student should paraphrase the text to show comprehension. Students explained that their grades for the standards portion of their progress report indicate how well they are learning the content in class and that the work habits portion of the progress report reflect their effort, timeliness, and participation in class, which is measured using the school participation rubric, "Make Your Presence Known!" Additionally, they stated that the portfolio portion is primarily about the quality of their finished products and that they are encouraged to revise their assignments as needed, to show their best work.
- An eighth grade student wrote an essay on the character, Atticus Finch, from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The teacher indicated the performance level on the rubric criteria that describe how well the essay conveys ideas, concepts, and information, and how well the essay is organized and presents evidence from the text. In addition, the teacher specified that the student needed to provide a topic sentence in the second paragraph. On another essay on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inaugural address written by a grade 7 student, the teacher commented, "You did a great job beginning each paragraph with a claim" and went on to remind the student to explain what Roosevelt wanted the American people to know.
- Students say that exit tickets are a common part of their classwork and are used to determine if they need extra help. An exit slip for a grade 6 math lesson asked students to self-assess how well they could translate words into algebraic expressions, to support the learning objective of the lesson, which that outlined three steps: annotate to identify key words, choose the math operations, and change the words into numbers. This exit ticket paralleled the items the teacher had identified as the look-fors in the lesson plan and the collated results informed the groupings for the next lesson.
- Students in a self-contained special education class were reading self-selected books independently while the teacher conducted individual conferences. She had prepared students for the conference by reminding them that she would be "focusing on your next steps from our last conference." During one conference, she reminded a student to write any unknown words in his notebook to help him remember them and made notes on his progress. The teacher noted that the individual conferences help her identify topics for future lessons and to support students as they choose books for their independent reading.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff establish a culture for learning and consistently communicate to parents and students the expectations around preparing for high school and college, providing individualized supports to achieve those expectations.

Impact

Students and parents understand the progress students make as they prepare for success in high school.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents stated that they are informed about the progress their children make toward meeting the goals that they set each marking period. They further stated that they and their children track progress using an online grade reporting system that they believe helps students take responsibility for their own learning. Parents and students noted that guidance counselors provide advisory programs on high school articulation and support them throughout the search and application process. Report cards and progress reports provide parents with information about the progress their child is making toward meeting grade-level standards. For example, feedback in a grade 8 progress report in February includes how well the student uses academic vocabulary, cites text evidence, and perseveres in solving problems in math.
- The *Student and Family Handbook 2015 - 2016* outlines what is expected in order for students to be prepared to be “successful in whatever career or college path you choose.” Students are informed that they are expected to think critically, act compassionately, and work effectively. The expectations outline that in order to be successful, students must be able to analyze text, explain what they have learned in writing or verbally, and construct claims and justify arguments with text-based citations. They are exhorted to “make your presence known in positive and productive ways every day in every class.” According to the School Quality Snapshot, 78% of this school’s former eighth graders earned enough high school credit in grade 9 to be on track for graduation.
- In the middle of the school year, every student meets individually with a mentor from community-based organizations or school support teams to analyze and discuss their progress reports. Students reflect on what they have accomplished and are guided as they determine how to ensure they are making progress toward their goals. During these sessions, students focus in particular on the work habits and skills they need to develop in order to be prepared for the future. One student noted that he would have to study at home and do all of his homework in order to achieve his improvement goals.