



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

School of Diplomacy

Middle School X370

**3710 Barnes Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Sean Licata

**Date of review: March 4, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Buffie Simmons**

The School Context

School of Diplomacy is a middle school with 235 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 51% Black, 38% Hispanic and 3% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 30% 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 is 87.6%.

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	Developing
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Across the school, teachers participate in structured teacher teams which address the instructional focus and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams promote teacher leadership opportunities and voice within instructional decisions.

Impact

Inquiry team collaborations are building teacher capacity which is leading to student progress. Distributive leadership structures allow teachers to make key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During the teacher team, teachers shared that they receive professional development to refine the structure of their meetings. Teacher teams use protocols to examine student work and data. Teacher teams review essential questions based on data, such as “What is a priority question your team wants to explore aligned to your team’s analysis of the student learning?” Afterwards, to address the learner-centered problem, the teams drill down the data and identify three specific high-leverage skills or standards as the major areas of student need. To develop the problem of practice, the teams decide on the first skill with the highest leverage that will be targeted and identify a problem of current teacher practice aligned to that specific skill. Accordingly, teachers stated during the interview that they are strengthening their instructional capacity. Teachers use the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to focus on which component is best aligned to the problem of practice.
- Teachers have the opportunity to share and observe best practices. Teachers shared that they are learning from each other and this fosters a culture that highlights commendable teacher practices. In addition, teacher teams contribute to the professional development plans. This model, along with the use of a peer instructional coach, demonstration teachers, assistant principals, an emerging leadership program, and teacher leadership has created an environment of increased instructional capacity which is reflected in improved *Advance* ratings. Moreover, during the interview, teachers stated that they have a voice in key decisions. Teachers use an online curriculum mapping tool, Atlas Rubicon, to modify curriculum, unit plans and collaborate on instructional decisions that bolster their skills. Teachers take into account learning styles when planning activities and integrate scaffolds when needed, such as the four square method to support students with organization.
- By looking at student work, teachers learn strategies from their team members and collaborate to brainstorm ideas that would address the targeted student’s needs. For example, the area of focus for grades 6 and 7 is ratios and proportional relationship and for grade 8 is functions, expressions and equations. The math teacher team selected students that performed low in the respective area of focus and targeted strategies, such as engaging students in a discussion and providing a visual aid, to help students better understand.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Observation of teaching practice indicates an uneven application of differentiation and instructional strategies to provide appropriately challenging and rigorous learning opportunities that promote high achievement.

Impact

As a result, not all students are consistently engaged across all classrooms and work products reflect uneven levels of student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional goals include student-centered learning and higher-order questioning and discussions; however, questioning techniques did not expand to the student-to-student level. Classroom visits revealed that pedagogical practices were inconsistently aligned with the school-wide goals on discussion. For example, in a science class students were determining the pH levels of substances. The teacher asked a series of questions to attempt to activate prior knowledge such as "What is a base? What is a pH?" A few students responded to the teacher while other students copied the aim. The teacher used a technique to call on random students and they responded to the teacher. In an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) grade class, students waited while a teacher distributed post-its and worksheets to students. Students were tasked to work in partnership to list any division words they knew. Some students worked on the task but many students had their heads down or worked independently. When asked about the activity, students in the group stated they did not know. The lack of explicit modeling and higher-order questioning skills limit cognitive development.
- Across the classrooms, teachers posted discussion questions but many did not use or refer to them. For example, in a grade 8 math class, students were tasked to find a connection and relationship between variables by using functions. Students worked in groups. The teacher demonstrated a function. The teacher gave limited wait time after asking, "How do you get functions? Did you get that?" Students responded to the teacher and were not given the opportunity to respond to each other and build upon classmates' responses. Students were unable to share strategies orally to demonstrate deep understanding. Few supports were provided for struggling students or students with disabilities, leading to some students' inability to participate in the task.
- In some classes, teachers encouraged discussions, however, such practices are not present across all classrooms. In a grade 8 English Language Arts (ELA) class, the teacher engaged the class in discussion. Students used the questions in their group. Students used textual evidence. The teacher referred to the discussion questions, "What is good and right and how do we decide that? Why does George stay with Lennie? Is this indicative of a true friendship? What stuck with you today?"

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school has aligned curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards with the integration of the instructional shifts. Critical thinking and analytical skills are consistently emphasized and coherently planned for all learners across grades and subjects.

Impact

The curricular planning promotes coherence which ensures that students are college and career ready. Tasks across grades and content areas emphasize higher-level thinking for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project*, *Code X* and *EngageNY*. The school has partnered with Atlas Rubicon as a support in adjusting curricular and instructional practices to align with Common Core Learning Standards. The school participates in the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI). One component of MSQI, for example, is *Word Generation* which the school has embedded as a part of the integration of the instructional shift of teaching academic and content vocabulary. Grade 7 unit plans include the vocabulary program in alignment with the reading standards for determining the word meaning and to analyze the impact of word choices.
- The school has built opportunities to engage in learning that promotes college and career readiness. The school uses the Project-Based Inquiry Science middle school curriculum. Students learn the way scientists learn, by exploring questions and scientific discoveries, investigating experiments, gathering evidence and forming explanations. In addition, writing tasks are integrated into the science curriculum.
- Academic tasks encourage thinking for students. For example, grade 8 students had to analyze incidents in a story to reveal aspects of a person's character and provoke a decision. In the *Of Mice and Men* unit plan, students had to state whether they agree or disagree to statements pertaining to euthanasia and internal struggles of the characters. According to the activities, students had to analyze dialogue and characters, cite textual evidence, and collaborate with peers.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and develop assessments and rubrics aligned with the school's grading policy. Assessments track progress of students towards goals.

Impact

The use of common assessments provides teachers with information on progress, is used to inform instructional groups, and provides actionable feedback to students on their achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a variety of common assessments, such as Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), simulations, periodic assessments, unit tests in literacy and math, Measures of Student Learning (MOSL), *Rally!*, and state assessments to track student progress. The school uses common assessments to determine individual student progress towards goals and adjust curricula and instruction. Teachers formally assess students using writing responses, pre- and post- assessments, New York State exam item analyses, unit tasks checklists and exit slips. For example, students use portfolio reflection sheets. Students answered the questions, "How does this artifact demonstrate what you know and can do? How could this work be improved? How might this knowledge or skill help you in the future?" During the interview, students shared that they received rubrics for performance tasks and feedback to support their learning.
- School practice in developing Common Core-aligned assessments, rubrics, and grading policies are consistent and cohesive across grades and subjects. Teachers design and use multiple assessments and track data to impact instruction. During the team meeting, teachers shared that they collaborate on learning targets before using formative assessments to measure student mastery of standards. According to a grade 8 ELA benchmark, students struggled with comparing and contrasting two or more texts and with analyzing how the structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style. Conversely, the data revealed that students performed better on particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama that propel the action, reveal aspects of a character or provoke a decision. The results of the data and item analysis has allowed for placement of group work and progress monitoring.
- Class-level data charts are used to track levels across grades and subjects. Based on New York State data, teachers look at priority standards to determine the areas of need. Teachers shared that based on last year's assessment they noticed that student writing was limited and began to focus on integrating more writing throughout the curriculum. Teachers monitored and tracked data of subgroups. Item analysis for benchmark assessments inform academic intervention supports. Teachers assess students regularly using common assessments such as unit exams, benchmark exams, periodic assessments and assessment checklists. The literacy and math instructional leads look at teachers' assessment data and provide feedback using the data analysis feedback form. Teachers then use this feedback to inform their action plans, such as around identifying students' strengths and areas of student growth as revealed on the post-tests. Teachers also create opportunities for re-teaching where needed.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations to staff, students, and parents to engender accountability for continuous student progress.

Impact

As a result, there is a sense of accountability amongst staff, and parents understand expectations around college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's focus on raising levels of student outcomes through communicating professional standards inspires accountability for teaching and learning. School leaders utilize meetings to convey clear professional and behavioral expectations. The school leaders communicate high expectations to the staff through check-ins, talking with teachers and observation feedback. For example, a school leader attached an article from *Educational Leadership*, "Co-Teaching to Reach Every Learner," to the feedback given to an ICT teacher with the expectation that the teacher will have to read and share two strategies at the next special education team meeting. Accordingly, the school leaders hold the staff accountable for imparting high expectations for learning by providing professional development in Common Core Learning Standards linked to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Clear messages around expectations for adults as leaders of learning and high regard for professionalism lead established classroom routines. Currently, teachers attend outside professional development meetings and are encouraged to turnkey trainings for the rest of the staff.
- School leaders hold teachers accountable by collecting minutes and agendas from teacher team meetings and then giving feedback on the minutes that includes next steps. According to the principal, school leaders analyze teacher team impact through multiple assessments and teachers evaluate each other around inquiry and bulletin boards.
- The school community espoused the school goal of 90.7% in attendance and has surpassed their goal with an attendance rate of 91% year-to-date. Flyers and documents promulgated throughout the school. Though the current attendance rate is 91%, the school leaders continues to hold staff, parents and students accountable by communicating and encouraging families in the school's efforts. Additionally, families spoke of the communication received concerning academic support. Parents shared that the school's website and a new application that provides parents with feedback is very helpful. The parents stated the teachers respond right away via email. Conversely, the parents indicated that the school needs more workshops and extracurricular programs, such as music and arts programs, to connect more college and career readiness skills and to create more opportunities for them to successfully support their children's learning and progress.