



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Mott Hall Community School

Middle School X467

**650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465**

Principal: Benjamin Basile

**Date of review: May 3, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

Mott Hall Community School is a middle school with 249 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 9% Black, 69% Hispanic, and 18% White students. The student body includes 6% English Language Learners and 29% 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 91.5%.

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	Developing
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	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	Focus	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Expectations connected to career and college readiness are shared with families.

Impact

School leaders provide training and have a system of accountability for meeting identified expectations. School leaders and staff offer ongoing feedback to families to help them understand their children's progress towards expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate their high expectations to staff through newsletters, emails, a staff handbook, and through feedback from Danielson aligned observations, as well as in-person feedback. A school wide focus on increasing rigor using Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) is a focus and appeared in a series of professional development agendas led by school coaches. These sessions were followed by rounds of observations and written reports that specifically provided teachers with feedback focusing on the use of DOK questions in class discussions.
- Teachers stated that the principal shares expectations with them after his weekly cabinet meeting. They stated that one of the school foci is looking closely at data to inform instruction. To this end, the principal purchased a student focused on-line learning program, that provides teachers with data they need to be able to differentiate to meet student needs. Teachers are held accountable as to the use of data through observations. In one observation report, a teacher received feedback that stated that the lesson was highly effective because "the entire lesson was based on data from the February interim assessment." Additionally, in many classrooms, teachers publicly displayed student data.
- The principal purchased a new literacy program, sent teachers out to attend professional development, and has purchased on-site professional development from Teachers College to support this program. Additionally, professional development agendas showed that assistant principals and coaches provided workshops for this program around developing coherent teaching points and strategies across grades. These sessions were tied to designing coherent instruction from the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and were a follow up to the professional development on questioning and discussion using *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) stems in writing.
- Parents stated that they receive monthly packets that outline what their children will be working on. This packet provides families with information on upcoming units and expectations in student work. Additionally parents stated that through *Engrade*, an online grading book, they are able to track and monitor their children's achievement, including projects and missing homework. Parents shared that in addition to *Engrade*, they receive emails, text and phone messages, from the school. They stated that teachers are always available to meet with them and to explain grades and assignments thoroughly. They stated that "Super Tuesdays" is a structure where teachers are available for conferences about student achievement or how to provide their children with additional help.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, and/or rubrics, that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

As a result, students receive limited feedback and there are inconsistent adjustments made to instruction in order to meet student-learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- In a science lab, students followed a procedure to create their own wet mount specimen slide. Students were asked to use various magnifications to look at letters that had been cut from newspaper. Students were directed to record their observations under low and medium focus and to sketch what they saw. While the teacher stopped at tables to listen to student observations, no recording of student responses was observed. This lack of recording of student information was a trend across various classes and it hinders teachers' ability to track student performance and achievement to make needed instructional adjustments.
- Checks for understanding in classrooms sometimes focus on agreement and not on understanding the content or the application of skill. For example, in a social studies class the teacher modeled a think aloud on how to draw inferences from a picture. As a check for understanding, she asked students to show thumbs-up or thumbs-down if they agreed that she had made a good inference. Although there were some thumbs down, the teacher moved on with the lesson, did not engage with the students about their responses, and made no adjustment to ensure all students' understanding.
- Work samples from the student meeting revealed that their work displayed numerous corrections or suggestions for revisions, but not all pieces of work were accompanied by a rubric. Some of the work samples that included a rubric did not provide written feedback on next steps, but had only the rubric's criteria circled or highlighted. While some students were able to share teacher feedback that they remembered from conferences, the feedback was not always actionable.
- While some teachers use rubrics, such as the Teachers College writing rubric, that provide descriptions of the qualities of good writing, other teachers staple scoring rubrics to student work without providing additional comments to guide the student's next steps. For example, a math task given one point using the State scoring rubric indicates that the work is "incomplete or exhibits many flaws" but the teacher did not give additional actionable feedback showing the student how to improve their response.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards. Academic tasks are beginning to reflect planning to provide students access.

Impact

The school is currently in the process of integrating several curriculum to ensure career and college readiness. Curricula and tasks reflect planning to cognitively engage a diversity of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders are transitioning the English Language Arts curriculum from *Expeditionary Learning* and *Codex*, which was used in different grades, to the Teacher's College *Core Ready* program for all grades. This decision was made so that there would be one uniform and cohesive curriculum that would build skills across the grades. Additionally, previous programs focused on writing short responses that answered a prompt. School leaders wanted a curriculum that engaged students in writing argument and informational essays aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and required for career and college writing.
- The school uses the following Common Core-aligned curriculum: *CMP3* and *EngageNY* for math, and the NYC Scope and Sequence Curricula for science and social studies. In grade 7, students are engaged in studying geology and use science investigations in the unit to write an explanatory essay explaining natural phenomenon. In grade 6, students are exposed to a unit in comparative world religions to examine belief systems of the Eastern Hemisphere. At the end of this unit, students are expected to write an informative essay on the similarities and differences of these beliefs systems using historical events and primary and secondary documents. In a grade 6 math unit, students find the rate of unit as a constant of proportionality and represent proportional relationships with equations.
- A review of October student data showed that with the increase in use of *Depth of Knowledge* questions in the school, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities, struggled with explaining their thinking and why what they were learning is important. Therefore, the school adopted a uniform lesson plan template in order to ensure that teachers are now moving to planning instruction that follows the newly implemented workshop model to ensure that there are enough resources and strategies for struggling students. This template contains components including but not limited to: long- and short-term learning targets, standards, and vocabulary. A section labeled "Differentiation/Universal Design for Learning", lists supports such as read aloud, graphic organizers, the pre-teaching of vocabulary, independent practice, and guided groups. In alignment to the school's focus on increasing the use of *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK), many lessons include questions stems and sentence starters, specifically for engaging students in tasks across the DOK continuum. Additionally, lessons and units reflect the use of native language materials and the use of Google Translate to ensure that students have a reference point for languages.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

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

Impact

As a result of inconsistent implementation of multiple entry points, there is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student discussions and work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In one social studies class, students read a magazine article on poachers and the African ivory trade. Student were grouped so that there was one high level reader in each group leading a discussion based on the different task cards on the table, such as “Describe the tone of the article.” The question on the board was “Is it ever acceptable to kill an animal?” Students had to complete an organizer that asked among other things, to describe a photo on page 16 and to share some “reason why China is the world’s top consumer of ivory.” A review of student work revealed many blank organizers. Organizers that displayed some writing only reflected that students copied the teacher model. No other scaffolds other than the graphic organizers were in use, and there was very little student discussion. When students were asked about the article they were reading, they could only say that it was about poachers killing elephants for the ivory.
- In an English Language Arts class, students had excerpts of a biography of Christa McAuliffe of the Challenger spaceship disaster, and excerpts of the speech that President Reagan gave on that day. Students were asked to decide which piece had a stronger impact on them. At one table, students questioned the text and shared their observations. They discussed the fact that the biography focused on McAuliffe as though her life was the only one lost that day, while the President’s speech recognized all of the lives lost and made this into a national tragedy as opposed to a personal loss. Another student responded with, “The point is that the other crew members were all astronauts and McAuliffe was not. She was a civilian. As the teacher, she carried a message for all of us and that is what was lost that day.” This high level of student discussion was not heard in most of the other classes visited.
- In a Regents math class, students worked in small groups on math problems involving the use of the Pythagorean Theorem. Students worked collaboratively and were heard discussing procedures and solutions to the math problems. Students set up their math problems and used calculators to find the solutions. Students were observed using one of four different worksheets depending on need and tasks. Two recently registered English Language Learners, (ELLs), who spoke no English, were paired with students who spoke the same native language as well as English. In addition, they had a worksheet both in English and in the students’ native language as support. However, this deliberate use of scaffolds was not observed in other classrooms.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations teams; however, they are ineffectively connected to school goals and assessment data for students they share.

Impact

Professional collaborations allow for observations about student work and data. However, these actions do not yet result in improved teacher practice or progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- In an inquiry team meeting, teachers were listing observations about their students’ work. Teachers were able to summarize some facts about student performance, such as the fact that the benchmark results for grade 8 demonstrated that students knew how to cite evidence, but did not explain and develop it to support their position. For grade 7 students, teachers noted that students could summarize the evidence, but did not know how it supported the claim. However, teachers’ responses were a summary of their noticings, and they did not always connect to looking at specific student work.
- During the inquiry meeting, teachers revisited one of their previous meetings involving the use of peer assessments to improve the quality of student writing. Teachers shared that after looking at student essays that had gone through peer evaluations; the essays did not reflect improvement. One of the observations that they made was that students generally paired with their friends and gave them feedback such as “Great job”. However, when the teachers looked at the student work that had been through peer evaluations, they noticed that there were major errors in the work. They concluded that providing students with opportunities to engage in peer evaluation was not productive because students were not using the rubric to provide feedback. Consequently, teachers decided to develop strategies for ensuring that friends are not paired with each other so that there would not be missed opportunities to support students in using the rubric accurately for peer feedback or self-reflections to increase student progress.
- In a meeting, teachers discussed student essays they had analyzed. Teachers made an observation that the students’ difficulty in developing their argument was a result of challenges in reading complex texts. During this meeting, teachers decided to provide students with a template where they could “just plug in their information.” While teachers identified the challenge as a reading problem, they did not focus on making instructional adjustments to create access to complex text so that students would be engaged in appropriately challenging texts needed to produce student products. This practice hinders student progress towards reading complex texts and argument writing, needed for career and college readiness.