Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Evergreen Middle School for Urban Exploration
Middle School K562
125 Covert Street
Brooklyn
NY 11207

Principal: Lauren Reiss

Date of review: March 26, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit
The School Context

Evergreen Middle School for Urban Exploration is a middle school with 343 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 28% Black, 68% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% Asian students and 1% other. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.1%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use ongoing assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core and content standards and emphasize rigorous higher-order thinking skills for a diversity of learners. Curricula and tasks are refined and planned using student work and data.

Impact
All students are engaged in relevant and grade level work that is appropriately differentiated for them. The curricula and academic tasks promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers with the assistance of administrators and their coach develop curricula and academic tasks that are Common Core aligned and incorporate the instructional shifts. Teachers developed the 6th and 7th grade English language arts curricula. Teachers use a lesson template that requires them to list the content standards and shifts related to the lessons as well as identify the school’s foci such as the structures in the Hochman Writing program being utilized in the lessons to support students’ literacy skills.

- Many structures were put in place to ensure coherence throughout the grades and content areas and to support new teachers with planning. These structures promote rigor and are opportunities for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, to demonstrate their thinking. Some examples of these structures are ICE (illustrate, calculate and explain) in math. Posters and graphic organizers are posted in every math classroom asking students to illustrate with a diagram or drawing to help visualize the problem, calculate or put numbers and decide on the operations needed and finally, look back at the diagram and calculations to write a brief explanation of their thought process. Across classrooms, teachers use the ACT (analyze complex text) template adapted from Judith Hochman’s Basic Writing program to build students’ writing skills.

- Tasks and curricula are planned using data and student work. In the seventh grade, an English language arts unit on Exploring Gender and Identity through Literacy unit was developed with modified texts based on students’ reading levels and interest. A guided reading component was added to support students’ reading expectations. The 8th grade curricula was revamped after the first unit with CodeX because most students struggled with the material. In science, a 6th grade unit on Energy was fleshed out with essential questions, lists of knowledge students will know, skills students will be able to do and possible misconceptions as well as examples of ways to clarify those misconceptions.
## Area of Focus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices consistently provided multiple entry points into the curricula. Students’ work products and discussions reflected high levels of engagement. However, instructional strategies did not allow all students to fully own their learning.

### Impact

The practice of implementing lessons which take into account students’ strengths and areas for improvement enables students to engage in higher-order thinking activities and discussions and to produce work that reflect high levels of thinking and participation. However, because of a lack of extensions, instructional strategies did not allow all students to fully own their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Scaffolds were evident in the classrooms visited. Differentiation happened with the content, product and/or process across classrooms. This ensured different groups of students had access to the curricula. In a social studies class, students were given different war time posters to analyze regarding US propaganda. In a Native Language Arts (NLA) class, students were given different templates/graphic organizers to support them in their reading and writing activities. Finally in a math class, students were asked to use all learned circle facts and formulas to calculate the area of a circle. Groups were given different materials to work with. Some students were given a circle with the diameter drawn in, others had to draw those themselves based on the directions given. Others still, were given white boards to practice their answers before sharing with their groups.

- Students were engaged in discussions that reflected high levels of thinking and participation. In a 6th grade class, different groups of students were reading different poems. While students were working with their partners, the teacher was circulating and asking questions to ensure they understood the gist of their poem. The teacher asked one student who was reading “A rose grew from concrete”, “What does that say about the human condition?” The student replied, “The rose is a person growing up”. The teacher continued “If the rose is the person, what does the concrete represent?” The student replied “The bad things around. Life!” The teacher then asked him to share his thoughts and the evidence he used to formulate those thoughts with his partner. In another class, students were debating about the texts they were given. Each group was given a text or graphic that either supported or was against Prohibition. A group of students were arguing about their picture which showed a drunk man beating his wife. Their debate was around whether or not alcohol made people violent. Each student was looking to support his/her claim with texts or parts of the picture.

- Across classrooms, students were engaged with grade level work that was scaffolded. However, many of the conversations observed were teacher-led or teacher facilitated. Teaching practices limited the opportunities for students to work independently as well as facilitate their group’s processes, thereby fully own their learning.
Additional Findings

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<thead>
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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals. Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding as well as student self and peer assessments.

Impact
The analyses of data from common assessments, checks for understandings, and students’ self- and peer-assessments help to plan and refine curricula and tasks so adjustments meet all students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress towards goals and adjust curricula accordingly. Fountas and Pinnel, baselines, midlines and endlines of the Performance Series, as well as checks for understanding (for example, fist to five, do now, exit slips) are all used to adjust instruction and curricula. Based on exit slip analyses, an 8th grade teacher retaught a lesson on how theme is conveyed in texts as well as modified the instruction on the theme checklist to a smaller number of criteria for students to self-assess.

- One of the common assessments used at the school was the common vocabulary assessments. Common vocabulary assessment baseline results steered the staff to not continue to administer this test as planned. Students were not doing well in them and thus they were changed to less extensive, more regular vocabulary quizzes instead. These provided better data to the staff to use to make curricular adjustments.

- Across classrooms, there was evidence of checks for understanding and student self- and peer-assessment. In an NLA class, students used cards to signal to the teachers whether or not they were able to do the work independently or with peer or teacher support. In many classrooms, the graphic organizers given to students were differentiated to ensure students could do the work and thus provide data for teacher analysis. Also, across classrooms, students used group work protocols to self and peer assess. In a self-contained history class, students had group norms taped on their desk and were asked to refer to them as they were working. In an integrated co-teaching class, students were given group norms as they were working collaboratively as well as roles for each group member to ensure accountability of each team member for the work. These were shared with the teacher for review/analysis.
**Findings**
School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations connected to college and careers with families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations to students.

**Impact**
Feedback connected to college and career readiness is consistently provided to families to help them understand student progress towards the expectations. Consistent and ongoing feedback and guidance given to students help prepare them for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**
- The school consistently communicates expectations that are connected to a path to college and careers to students. The Ever Prep and Teach like Champion principles such as positive framing, normalizing errors and organization of portfolios, guide the work of the staff with students. Students and teachers spoke about the work students’ are engaged in preparation of the next level. For example, the Sedition Act was compared to the Patriot Act as part of the real world topics teachers are infusing in the curricula. Students do research on high schools they are interested in. 126 of 131 8th graders were matched to a high school of their choice this year. The Ever Buck store helps to instill in the students’ life skills such as responsibility accountability and leadership.

- Supports offered to students are multifold. Teachers offer students supports on Wednesdays, Saturdays, before, after school and during lunch. Students spoke about receiving academic and socio-emotional support with the tally program. It helps them self-regulate. There is a strong emphasis on keeping the school clean, safe and routines consistent especially for those students in shelters. The 8th graders during the student interview shared how different the school’s tone is once the principal instituted a universal behavior system which delineates the expectations for success to all.

- Families are aware of the work and vision of the school to prepare students for life after middle school. They shared the principles of EVER PREP, and the supports offered to their children to succeed in school. For example, families mentioned the staff ensured availability before, during and after school to provide academic support to students as well as to meet with them. They shared the types of supports they receive for high school preparation such as workshops on the high school application process and one-on-one meetings for families with the guidance counselor. Teachers share websites with parents and students to support learning at home. The school communicates with families via Engrade which is regularly updated, parent teacher conferences, email, mail, phone calls, awards’ nights, newsletters, among other ways. One parent explained that the school has gone out of its way to get her child interested, engaged and more relaxed in school, as what she values about and is grateful for the school.
**Quality Indicator:** 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development  
**Rating:** Proficient

**Findings**
The majority of teachers are engaged in teacher-led structured inquiry based professional collaborations during which they look at student work and there are opportunities for staff input into instructional decisions.

**Impact**
The teacher inquiry collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core. They result in coherence across grades and subjects, student progress towards goals and strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers leading to a clear teacher voice in key decisions.

**Supporting Evidence**
- The majority of teachers meet regularly in structured professional collaborations. They meet for the inquiry team work, every teacher and paraprofessional supports students looked at during inquiry. Teachers meet in department meetings, grade team meetings, in the student intervention team, and at retreats. They participate in intervisitations which help strengthen teacher practice. They receive and offer professional development and continuously work on the Hochman Basic Writing program, the principles of Teach Like a Champion, Analyze Complex Text (ACT) protocol among other school-wide initiatives to build coherence throughout the school and align to the instructional shifts. These initiatives have also helped students build their literacy, especially writing skills. Students are writing more and better quality papers across the grades.

- Teachers have led professional development especially to support their colleagues with meeting the needs of the subgroups. English as a second language and Special education teachers have provided professional development on ways to provide supports and scaffold for different learners. Some teachers mentor those new to the profession.

- Teachers offer ideas for school wide programs including clubs. Some of the initiatives lead by teachers are the newcomers’ club for very beginner English language learners, the theater program, gardening (the green team), and morning phonics. Teachers spoke about their plans to lead more professional development opportunities in the future as they were planning for that around the time of the visit.