Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

High School K647

985 Rockaway Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212

Principal: Meri Yallowitz

Date of review: May 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: LaShawn Robinson
The School Context

Metropolitan Diploma Plus is a Transfer high school with 192 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 83% Black, 15% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 69.1%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings
The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that are aligned with the school’s instructional goals. Teacher teams consistently analyze classroom practice, assessment data and student work across content areas.

Impact
The work of teacher teams has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence which leads to college and career readiness. Current collaborations support the implementation of the instructional shifts, help to improve teacher practice, and support the attainment of the school’s goals and goals for specific student subgroups.

Supporting Evidence
- Teacher teams are engaged in cycles of collaborative inquiry by looking at student work and data in order to make purposeful adjustments to instruction and to better target student support. In a teacher meeting observed, teachers were able to describe the instructional inquiry cycle and share how student work drives revisions to curriculum and adjustments to instruction. Through inquiry cycles, teachers examine student work by using a protocol to evaluate strengths and deficiencies. Teachers described that they typically select three students (low, medium, high skill level) to examine during the week and to develop instructional targets that can be used to support groups of students. During the science team meeting, teachers shared students and tracked progress over time of the skill of annotation and making inferences. The teachers shared student work and discussed how the annotation strategy is helping students to determine importance and answer extended responses for the Living Environment Regents practice questions. One teacher explained, “Before we started doing annotation, he (student) was leaving most of these questions blank. Now, the student attempted to answer all of the questions. We noticed that when the questions are low stakes, he is typically willing to try.” The teacher also reviewed how students made progress with making inferences.

- The master schedule is strategically planned to include common planning time which affords teacher teams an opportunity to meet daily and drive instructional coherence. Documents developed are shared in the school’s Google Drive folder. In addition to content area teams, teachers meet in cross-functional teams to focus on instructional coherence and target instructional strategies across disciplines. For example, social studies and science teachers plan with English teachers to align theme, text, and focus-skill, therefore, skill development is emphasized and aligned across the school. Teachers described that they are working with students to develop claims and counterclaims across disciplines. In addition, they are working on peer feedback and self-assessment through the use of common rubrics such as the annotation rubric. A teacher described, “The more they use the rubrics, they will have a better understanding of what we are looking for.”

- All teachers participate in instructional rounds and engage in inter-visitations and peer feedback about their teaching practices. Teacher teams also have an opportunity to visit other network schools and learn from their instructional practices. Additionally, the school is a Labsite school and one of the teachers was selected by the network to host Labsite visits focusing on Danielson Component 3d, Using Assessment in Instruction. These opportunities are used at the school to identify their instructional strengths, and to target areas for improvement and support.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies include multiple entry points as well as extensions to support learners. Student discussion and work products reflect critical thinking, participation, and ownership. However, while the school has made gains in meeting the needs of advanced learners, it continues to find opportunities to provide additional extensions for higher level learners.

Impact
Teaching strategies include gradual scaffolding, effective release of responsibility, ensure high levels of student ownership and engage all students in appropriately challenging tasks that allow students to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in discussion and student work products.

Supporting Evidence
- Across all classrooms visited, student work products and discussion reflected high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership. For example, in a science class observed, students engaged in the speed share protocol, and engaged in small group discussion grounded on text-based evidence. During this activity, the teacher served as a facilitator and circulated around the class tracking noticings and using the school discussion tracker. Additionally, during the math lesson, students provided feedback to each other and assessed their work by determining which method was the best method to solve system of equations. All students in the classroom participated in the lesson and could explain their thinking.

- School culture encourages students to engage at high levels while providing necessary supports, such as entry points and appropriate scaffolds. For example, annotating is a common practice across classrooms and students were required to cite evidence from the text, summarize, paraphrase, determine importance, and make predictions and inferences. Chart notes and student work contribute to a print-rich environment and serves as a system of support for students, especially visual learners and students who struggle with attendance issues. Scaffolds allow students to access complex text effectively in a way that reflects their understanding. For example, in an English classroom visited, students used active group reading and annotation strategies throughout Every Little Hurricane to create a well-developed Regents question 27 using characterization as the literary element.

- Accountable talk strategies and student-to-student discussion were evident across classes. Students were comfortable agreeing and disagreeing with each other and supporting their ideas. Student discussions in the classes visited reflected a high level of comprehension of the text being covered in the class. In addition, there was evidence of writing across all classrooms, both during the lesson and posted throughout classrooms and hallways.
Additional Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings
School leaders and teachers align curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards, strategically integrate the instructional shifts, and ensure ongoing refinement and revision of their curricula and academic tasks through analyzing student work and data. Curricula and academic tasks are refined using student work and data.

Impact
There is curricular coherence and alignment across content areas that promote college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks provide multiple entry points and push students to think critically about their work.

Supporting Evidence
- Curriculum is thoroughly analyzed and refined using student work, and teachers make sure that the instructional shifts are strategically implemented and there is coherence in terms of skills being targeted across discipline such as determining importance, argumentative writing, inferring, annotation, and use of evidence so that subjects are aligned and students can make connections between subjects. A review of lesson plans and units revealed that across departments, teachers infuse writing and the use of textual evidence to support arguments. For example, in the ecology unit, students were expected to develop an argumentative essay on whether people in New York City should drink tap water or bottled water. For English, students wrote an argumentative writing piece about who or what is responsible for determining standards of beauty in America. Teachers described that they have an opportunity to share instructional tasks with their peers and receive feedback, especially when they are covering the same content, such as the two science teachers. This allows teachers an opportunity to revise tasks in order to better meet the need of students.

- There is consistency and coherence in planning and expectations for learning. All teachers develop Common Core aligned lesson plans and unit plans. The detailed lesson plans reviewed include key questions, tiered activities and opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. Lesson plans collected focused on embedded Common Core Learning Standards. For instance, in Algebra class, the lesson expected students to determine the best method for solving different systems of equations and to justify their reasoning and critique the work of others. In United States history, students use textual evidence to support their ideas as they determined the effects of Industrialization on American society. Furthermore, the principal described that they are adopting the Common Core Curriculum option, as this would enhance the work the school has already done with curricula and will ensure that students, including English language learners and Students with Disabilities, are provided multiple exposures to complex texts and provided with appropriate differentiation.

- As a member of the Transfer School Common Core Institute (TSCCI), selected teachers become members of the Common Core Acceleration Team and work with TSCCI coaches from Eskolta & ReDesign to develop, implement, and refine documents, including scaffolds and rubrics that focus on specific skills. Teachers also described that the worked they have done with the Transfer School Common Core Institute and the Children’s First Network professional development support has helped them to effectively evaluate their instructional tasks. Teachers explained that they had an opportunity to share their instructional tasks and student work with other Network schools and received feedback that assess their alignment to Common Core and rigor of instructional tasks.
Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment  Rating: Well Developed

Findings
Teachers analyze the results of student work, benchmark assessments and Regents assessment to adjust curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all students. Ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment are embedded across classrooms to delineate next learning steps for all students.

Impact
The school-wide focus on analyzing student work and summative data provides teachers and students with actionable and meaningful feedback in order to increase content mastery and skills for all students.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers regularly analyze data such as Regents, mock Regents, and assessment benchmarks to identify trends and target areas for improvement. Looking at student work protocols are used to analyze student work and to determine next appropriate steps. Additionally, through the inquiry process, teachers determine student progress toward goals and this information is used to adjust curriculum and tailor instruction to meet student learning needs. As a result of the teacher team work in this area, the school has focused on improving student skills in determining importance, inferring, argumentative writing, annotation and citing evidence from the text. Preliminary data from assessment benchmarks and the January Regents show increased achievement in determining importance, argumentative writing and annotation.

- The school uses a uniform grading policy, which is shared with all students, parents, and is posted throughout classrooms. Students benefit from a clear understanding of assessment criteria through the use of task-specific rubrics as observed in the science classroom and on display on bulletin boards throughout the school. Rubrics are used to assess student progress and set clear expectations for students and parents. The rubrics are aligned to the instructional foci of reading and writing grounded in evidence from text and the instructional strategy of annotation. Feedback provided to students is meaningful and actionable, with clear next steps for improvement. For example, students completed an activity to determine the impact of natural resources on development of a nation and had to cite evidence to support their responses. A student received feedback on the accuracy of the content, was asked to include a source in their writing, and required to give specific examples to support his statement. Additionally, students used rubrics and reflection sheets to assess their learning. For example, students self-assessed using an argumentative essay self-assessment rubric. Student assessed their use of evidence, quality of evidence, and stated, “My area of focus in to add more relevant evidence to my counter-claim.”

- Teachers embed assessment into their daily lessons in order to make timely adjustments to accelerate student learning. Monitoring students understanding happens daily and at the end of each week. “Focus Friday” is part of the culture of the school. This day, teachers have the opportunity to meet with students to discuss their progress, provide feedback and next learning targets. During classroom visits, teachers were observed checking for understanding, through the use of exit slips, summarizing, student self-assessment/peer assessments and reflections. In addition, teachers were observed chartering their noticing on data grids. The grids include conference notes as well as next steps for student learning.
Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
School leaders communicate high expectations to all staff about pedagogy and provide training aligned to school goals and the Danielson Framework. Staff and school leaders effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness, and successfully partner with families.

Impact
Across the school, there is a culture of mutual accountability to support student progress towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Through the partnership with the New York City Mission Society, a Community-Based Organization (CBO), every student is assigned to an advocate counselor that supports students with their academic targets and social-emotional development. Advocate counselors check in frequently with students and have access to current student data so they are able to target their interventions. In addition, both advocate counselors and teachers communicate regularly with parents via phone and through Skedula. The Skedula system allows parents to monitor their child’s academic progress in all classes on a daily basis, as well as, attendance and student behavior anecdotal. This way, students and families are aware of students’ successes and challenges and action plans to make improvements. A parent described, “I see where they (students) are being pushed and I see the engagement. Teachers are very positive and I see the difference in my daughter.”

- Every student meets individually with the school guidance counselor to create an "I Will Graduate Plan" that maps out clear steps for each student to complete their graduation requirements. These plans are also used as an opportunity to re-engage students that were previously disconnected from the educational process and give them a chance to get back on track for graduation. Students’ graduation plans are shared with parents and advocate counselors, so students can be supported through the achievement of their goals. The CBO ensures that students have an opportunity to visit colleges. Students commented: “This school is really providing us with opportunities to think critically. That’s going to help us when we get to college.” Both parents and students indicated that the courses they are taking are preparing them to be successful in college. Instructional strategies observed during class visits, such as annotation, self-reflection, providing peer feedback and opportunities to complete multiple revisions of assignments align with college expectations and are helping students to meet the trajectory for college and career readiness. In addition, the school has a Learn to Work program that is implemented through New York City Mission Society, which provide students with an opportunity to participate in paid internships that prepare them for college and careers.

- Professional development at the school aligns activities with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and instructional priorities. Teachers clearly articulate that they are expected to implement the instructional foci of writing and discussion. Teachers described that the professional development opportunities align with the school initiatives such as, building capacity through instructional rounds, and identifying effective interventions. Teachers shared that the school offers opportunities for coaching and support both through common planning time and with the targeted support provided by the instructional coach. Teachers are held accountable through a series of frequent observations focused on instructional priorities and the Danielson Framework for Teaching and through inter-visitations that support teacher growth.