Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Manhattan East School for Arts & Academics
Middle School M224
410 East 100th Street
Manhattan
NY 10029

Principal: Liliana Sarro

Date of review: March 24, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Hongying Shen
The School Context

Manhattan East School for Arts & Academics is a middle school with 164 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 30% Black, 51% Hispanic, 11% White, 5% Asian and 3% other students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school…</strong></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>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

Findings
All teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations that focus on increasing student achievement, and teachers have input on key decisions about curricula and instruction in classrooms.

Impact
The work of teacher teams results in school-wide instructional coherence and improved teacher practice, and distributed leadership structures affect teaching and learning at the school.

Supporting Evidence
- Grade teams and content area teams use assessment data, including student writing samples, end of unit tests and projects, and midterm assessments, to identify trends and areas of concern and to conduct inquiry cycles to inform curricula adjustments and classroom instructions. For example, the teams integrate the instructional shifts in all content areas to promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) by focusing on the skills of constructing viable arguments, critiquing reasoning of others, and engaging in argument from evidence across all grades and content areas. Therefore, the school achieves the instructional coherence that helps students learn in all classrooms.

- Teachers collaboratively plan and design curriculum maps and lesson units in the teacher team structure. The English teachers and social studies teachers co-plan units and lessons using a collaborative planning template. The teachers identify the learning goals for the units of Asian American Literature and World War II, plan the interdisciplinary experience in both content areas, design student self-assessment and peer assessment with a common rubric, and decide on the instructional resources and materials. This cycle of collaborative inquiry concludes with the teachers’ reflection on student work products. At the meeting with students, students mentioned their learning experience of the World War II unit, and shared that there was no perfect argument, but there were different perspectives and that writing blended in all classes, with focus on critical analysis and argument with evidence.

- At an eighth grade team meeting, teachers focused the discussion on how to evaluate an argument. Teachers shared what they noticed in student work in their respective content areas and discussed the instructional strategies to implement. The math teacher shared how she would design a lesson for all grades, including the students with disabilities, by presenting a solved math problem and guiding students to identify the relevant clues or claims to support the evidence.

- Two teachers participate in the Model Teacher program and the Emerging Teacher Leader program, focusing on inquiry-based professional collaborations to facilitate curricula design and effective teaching. The trained teachers implement what they have learned in the teacher team inquiry process and demonstrate knowledge of content and pedagogy in their classrooms. The model teacher has a demonstration schedule to demonstrate skills for all teachers in the four domains of Danielson Framework for Teaching, including designing coherent instruction in literature circles, engaging students in learning in Socratic seminars, and using assessment in instruction with low-inference notes.
### Area of Focus

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

**Findings**

Across classrooms, teaching practice reflects the belief that students learn best when they participate in discussions that involve high levels of student thinking.

**Impact**

Teaching practices informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching engage students in high levels of thinking in the classroom, yet they are not fully implemented to foster student self-direction and students taking ownership of the learning in all classrooms.

**Supporting Evidence**

- All teachers are engaged in the Danielson Framework for Teaching professional learning to support higher order questioning and discussion, which is aligned to the school's core belief that students learn best when they are engaged in high levels of questioning and discussions in the classroom. Across classrooms, students work in groups or in pairs, and have whole class discussions. In a sixth grade English language arts class, students were to analyze and answer questions based on a poem during a Socratic seminar. Students actively participated in the discussion, however, the seminar was more teacher led than student owned.

- An eighth grade social studies class studied the growth of industry in the early 1900s. The lesson was taught in whole class discussions as well as small group sessions, which were formed according to student abilities and readiness and were presented different reading levels of primary sources. Students used the SOLVE method to study the question, organize the evidence, link relevant details, verify the answer and explain the answer, which further supported English language learners and students with disabilities to take part in the scaffolded activity.

- In a sixth grade science class, students followed the scientific research method to determine from which test tube the HIV fluid originated. The teacher controlled the whole process of handling the test tubes and the simulation, and students waited for the teacher to deliver a drop of liquid in the tube each held and waited to be called on to share their observation. Though the teacher led a discussion along with the experiment to simulate how a virus can spread, the experiment was not structured so that students could practice as researchers to own the whole scientific process. The class summarized what were some of the ways to track down where a virus came from. Students were to complete an exit ticket and write about one thing they learned from the lesson, one comment and one question.

- In a self-contained seventh and eighth grade bridge math class, students worked in groups by grades and by readiness. The seventh grade group worked collaboratively to add integers on a math puzzle, using manipulatives and the “operations and integers resources” they had created before. The eighth grade group worked on a worksheet which required them not only to solve problems, but also write down their observations while solving the math problems. Two other students were doing a math scavenger hunt around the room to match the math problems placed around the room on the walls to the answers, and the level of difficulty increased as they hunted for the next answer.
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**
The school curricula are aligned with Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts to give all students access to rigorous academic tasks.

**Impact**
The focus on writing across content areas and higher-order skills in questioning and discussion results in curricula coherence that benefits all students’ learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A review of unit and lesson plans showed consistent alignment with Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), and unit design and lesson plans include multiple means of representation and engagement to accommodate all learners. For example, the social studies units have planned images and video clips to present materials in different ways, and graphic organizers to scaffold learning especially for English language learners. The unit plans also include sections for key vocabulary and a glossary.

- Grade teams meet weekly, focusing on curricula to ensure interdisciplinary connections and instructional coherence. The teams use teacher-created tools to systematically examine the effectiveness of instructional approaches, and do post-unit reflections based on the student work products. The use of the modified Bloom’s chart of questions is expanded from English into the content areas to promote rigorous habits and higher-order skills. In Math classes, students design mathematical questions and solutions and submit them to the teacher, who selects some of the student created questions to be included in the unit tests. These rigorous habits promote college and career readiness and prepare students for the next level of academic achievement.

- A unit on the topic of epidemics and diseases is designed to engage students in discussion of how individuals who are labeled as “sick” reconcile themselves to being stigmatized in society. Tiered graphic organizers are provided throughout the unit to allow all learners, including the English language learners, to access and master materials. Activities are modified based on both summative and formative assessments and students are grouped homogeneously so that they are able to both teach and challenge each other. Poetry, photography, film, and kinesthetic activities are integrated into the unit to allow learners with different learning styles a deeper accessibility to the analytical skills. All students demonstrate their thinking throughout the scaffolded activities.

- During the meeting, students stated that they write in math courses and the writing helped them organize thoughts and see the connection between what they learned and what they are learning. In an Algebra I unit, students begin by writing a one-paragraph description about what they already know about expressions, linear equations, systems of equations and/or laws of exponents. Writing is planned as part of the math learning throughout the whole unit, and students can demonstrate how they solve their math problems in writing.
Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment

Rating: Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the curricula to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact
Writing across curricula is used as one of the assessments to track student progress, which informs curricula and instruction adjustment.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers plan initial assessments before a unit or lesson, conduct formative assessments throughout the unit or lesson, and summarize a unit or lesson with a final performance task or written reflection to follow student progress. The eighth grade math unit starts with a journal activity, which requires students to write a central idea to reflect what they have learned and three details to support the central idea, using a rubric, while a social studies lesson ends with an exit ticket asking students to write about three things students learned and one or more things they are still unclear about.

- Teacher teams use assessment data and student work to adjust instruction and curricula. The eighth grade writing baseline assessment revealed that the majority of students either scored below or were at the intermediate level. The eighth grade team adjusted the curriculum to include a unit focusing on synthesizing, with the English teacher taking the lead on piloting the unit. In this unit students learn to synthesize texts by identifying multiple inferences and combining them into a new, complex idea. The team creates a synthesis master rubric to support student learning and follows student progress by looking at their writing samples. The end of unit assessment shows a significant increase in student achievement in both the 90-100 and 80-89 percentiles.

- Across classrooms, teachers design rubrics to assess student work in their content areas and to utilize a common rubric to assess literacy skills across the curricula. The rubrics that support student learning include the writing research rubric, oral presentation rubric, history circles rubric, literature circles rubric, and math project rubric. The sixth grade band curriculum requires students to develop an adjudication rubric for evaluating music performances. The assignment becomes an assessment of student knowledge and skills and a summary of their learning.
Findings
High expectations are conveyed to teachers through ongoing professional development aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. High expectations are effectively communicated to students to help them progress on the path to college and be career readiness.

Impact
Teachers engage in cycles of professional learning designed to grow practice and affect student learning. The school partnered with parents to support student academic growth.

Supporting Evidence
- The school leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and support teacher professional growth. Two teachers attend training to become the model teacher and the emerging teacher leader. The administration maintains a focus on school-wide goals for all staff through frequent cycles of teacher observations, conversations using the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and by attending teacher team meetings regularly. The administration and teachers collaboratively develop the school’s instructional focus for the year, a coherent set of beliefs on how students learn best, and the comprehensive educational plan goals.

- Teacher teams hold themselves accountable for high expectations through regular team meetings to fine tune curricular goals and priorities, and to set grade-wide and school-wide policies, such as the grading policy. Teachers reflect on their teaching to keep with the expectations in professionalism and instruction. The English unit plans and the social studies unit plans contain teacher reflections on the unit taught and ideas for curriculum adjustment to best support student learning. Teaching strategies are discussed at team meetings in inquiry cycles.

- The school partners with families to support student progress, and the Manhattan East Parent Advisory Council (MEPAC) is active in their children’s education and advocates for the students. The parents do fundraising for the school and the MEPAC assists with the school Welcome Reception and other events held during the school year, and prepares the school monthly Newsletter. The MEPAC Parent Handbook shares important information about the school with all the parents. At the meeting with parents, many shared that the school knows their children’s academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as their social emotional state. Parents receive very specific communication from teachers about their children to keep parents informed of their work. When one student had difficulty keeping track of his work, the teacher set up a calendar for the parent, so that the parent could come in to meet with the teacher and discuss the best educational plan for the student.

- Families’ involvement takes place in engaging activities, including the family welcome/orientation, international dinner and talent show, science exhibition and spring musicale. At curriculum/family night, teachers present their curriculum to the parents and parents can meet with a team of grade teachers to review their student progress and achievement towards graduation. Guidance and Advisory support students in the high school application process by scheduling high school visits and discussing options that are most suitable for individual student needs. During the school’s annual trip to Nature’s Classroom, students learned about themselves, each other and science. Students said that they are being prepared for life outside the school.