Quality Review Report

2014-2015

New Design Middle School
Middle School M514
625 West 133 Street
New York
NY 10027

Principal: Francesca Pisa

Date of review: February 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves
The School Context

New Design Middle School is a middle school with 275 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 55% Black, 40% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 30% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88.1%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>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>Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>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>Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>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>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>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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Area of Celebration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

School leaders consistently message high expectations to staff during trainings and other modes of communication. Ongoing feedback to families keeps them informed of student progress toward a path for college and career readiness.

Impact

Communication structures that support the school's high expectations build buy-in, leading to shared accountability amongst families and staff.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consider the staff handbook a “living” document that is continually referenced and updated as needed throughout the school year, ensuring that it is aligned to the school’s vision and goals. Staff members frequently use this resource to note coherence between their actions and school administrators’ expectations. This school year teachers unpacked and revised the school’s discipline policy in order to foster a climate conducive to learning.

- The principal stated that she shares her expectations through practices and modeling. For example, she developed and shared a bulletin board checklist with staff. Using the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DfT), school leaders provide both written and verbal feedback after classroom observations. Written feedback is uploaded on google documents so that administrators and staff have the opportunity for ongoing dialogue. A staff newsletter previewing meetings, professional development schedules and other activities is distributed at the beginning of each week. Additionally, the principal meets with the teaching cabinet on a bi-weekly basis to review and discuss her instructional expectations.

- The school’s online grading platform (Kickboard) is updated weekly by teachers to ensure that students and parents are kept well-informed of academic and social-emotional progress. Parents are able to review student grades, missing assignments, as well as behavior logs.

- Parents shared that there is “good communication” with teachers who ensure immediate contact with them via text messages, face to face meetings, workshops, as well as student progress reports which are back packed home twice per semester. They shared that the staff facilitated a curriculum night at the beginning of the school year where teachers across all content areas reviewed curricula expectations with them. Activities such as the Thanksgiving Harvest were well-attended celebratory events. The quarterly distributed New Design Parent Newsletter keeps parents apprised of upcoming events such as the snow tubing outing for eighth graders, the faculty-student basketball game in February, as well as notifying them of scheduled formative and summative assessments.
### Area of Focus

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

Although teaching practices are becoming aligned to the written curricula and the tenets of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, teachers do not yet consistently incorporate effective questioning and discussion strategies.

### Impact

Some teachers ask thought provoking questions, but, across grades, teaching practices do not require all students to productively struggle with tasks. This limits the level of student engagement, resulting in uneven levels of participation across classrooms and lost opportunities for students to demonstrate high order thinking skills.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal’s core belief is aligned to the constructivist model where “students learn by doing.” She communicates the belief that students and staff thrive best where productive disequilibrium creates opportunity to engage in critical thinking and problem solving. This belief system is at the beginning stages of development across departments and grades.

- Student work folders, classroom lessons and work displayed on bulletin boards inconsistently demonstrate high order critical thinking skills. For example, in one class students were simply asked to contrast colloquial and academic language. Additionally, although students are asked to cite evidence, some teachers are at the beginning stages of requiring them to gather and synthesize information, cite claims, draw conclusions and defend their positions.

- In an English class students were asked to analyze and integrate evidence from several sources to support their opinions and claims stating whether or not tap or bottled water is better for the environment. Students engaged in conversations with their peers citing textual evidence. However, this level of discourse was not observed across the majority of classrooms and grades. Although some teachers asked thought provoking questions, others did not. In some classrooms, the pattern of question and answer was primarily between the teacher and individual students. Additionally, teachers and students did not naturally follow up on student responses to prove and support understanding of taught concepts.

- Across classrooms student friendly learning targets begin with the statement “We are learning to...so that we ...We will know we have learned this when...” Teachers explicitly review the lesson focus with students. Additionally, smart boards, lap tops and other technology tools are used daily. Most teachers however do not use these tools to deepen student understanding of taught concepts. Smart boards are frequently used to display problems, notes and the lesson objectives but teachers do not consistently use them to enhance learning. As such all students do not receive the appropriate scaffolds and multiple entry points needed, resulting in uneven levels of understanding and student engagement.
Additional Findings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings

While the math and science curricula are aligned to the common core and state content standards, school staff members are beginning to align the English language arts and social studies curricula to the standards. Academic tasks across content are not consistently rigorous.

Impact

All learners do not consistently have access to coherently sequenced units of study and tasks do not always cognitively engage high performing learners. As such, all students are not consistently challenged and, at times have difficulty transferring their learning to new contexts.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of the English language arts curriculum revealed that staff members are using a combination of Code X, Expeditionary Learning and other curricula. Teachers integrate the instructional shifts such as requiring students to write argumentative essays and cite evidence from text. However, the use of the combination of multiple curricula resources results in a lack of coherency in unit plans across grades.

- The English as a second language (ESL) teacher pushes in to support the instructional needs of English language learners (ELLs). However, at times tasks are not rigorous. For example in one class ELLs were asked to write “True” or “False” to reflect their understanding of the topic. Similarly in another class students with individual education plans were asked to respond to several low level written questions such as “What is a lever?” and “Is a see saw a machine?”

- The principal shared that teachers are expected to use New York City’s scope and sequence to plan social studies lessons. Although the scope and sequence depict essential questions, unit plans are not fully aligned and, at times, tasks are not aligned to the essential questions to ensure that they are rigorous, sequenced and aligned to state standards.

- Across content areas unit plans do not consistently demonstrate scaffolds and entry points to meet the needs of all learners including those performing at the lowest and highest levels. As such, at times, designed tasks do not always challenge high achieving students. In some classrooms all students are asked to perform the same task although some may display mastery of the concept.
Findings

Teachers align assessments to the curricula and use the data to determine student progress towards established goals.

Impact

Data results help provide an accurate snapshot of students’ progress enabling staff to adjust curricula and instruction in order to support student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use rubrics to provide verbal and written feedback so that students are aware of their progress. For example, English teachers provide written feedback, explicitly by annotating student work with such statements as “Love your description of how you retell the story in your own words and point of view. You included evidence. Try to add more high level vocabulary and underline them.” Additionally one student shared that teachers confer and “break it down” to help her understand.

- The school uses common assessments across content areas such as Teachers College Reading Assessments (conducted in October, February and June), school designed Foundation assessments (given in October, February and May) and end of unit content assessments. Teachers review results to note trends and make adaptations to curricular unit plans. For example math teachers shared that students’ results revealed the need to focus on proportional reasoning across grades 6-8. This has now been infused and emphasized in the curriculum.

- School members are using a new technology program, WAGGLE, which provides items skills analysis data on an on-going basis. Item skills data can be generated daily and/or weekly as needed. Data from these reports are used to inform instructional planning and goal setting. Additionally, school administrators use the data to measure student growth, determine the rate at which they are closing the achievement gap for students and to plan professional development for staff.
Findings

Teachers participate in weekly professional collaborations across grades and departments. Leadership structures enable teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact

Team meetings strengthen teachers’ instructional capacity and enable them to assume collective responsibility for improving student outcomes. Distributed leadership structures enable teachers to build their pedagogic practices resulting in improved academic gains.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade level teacher teams meet on Wednesday mornings. During these meetings teachers review student work products and recommend students for individual and/or small group tutoring supports. Similarly, on Thursday mornings teachers participate in department team meetings where they review and revise curricula maps and units plans. Math department team members are presently engaged in a lesson study initiative with a well-respected math consultant. These teachers co-plan a specific lesson with individual teachers volunteering to teach the lesson in the presence of his/her peers. At the conclusion of the lesson, teachers meet to debrief, discussing the lesson’s alignment to standards, student success attaining the learning objective, the level of student engagement/discourse and future implications for changes to pedagogic practices. Teachers note that the lesson study collaborative format is helping to strengthen their instructional capacity as they learn and share strategies to support growth in student learning.

- On Mondays the principal meets with the instructional cabinet which is comprised of teacher leaders across departments. She also meets weekly with grade and department leads to share and review next steps. Team members develop the professional development calendar using student and teacher support data to revise the calendar to meet teachers’ individual, small group and whole school needs.

- Teacher teams review formative and summative results, share strategies and make instructional decisions. For example, during the English department team meeting, teachers reviewed three pieces of student work products categorized as low, medium and high, from the recently given persuasive writing performance based assessment. Teachers discussed the implications for instruction noting the need to teach students to cite sources and elaborate on their claims / counter claims.

- Teachers demonstrate their leadership skills when they facilitate weekly grade/department meetings. Teachers stated that the use of the Vertical Slice Protocol helps them analyze, assess and make content recommendations regarding student needs across grade bands. Additionally, based on an internal survey, teachers participate on differentiated study groups facilitated by their peers. One teacher has also assumed the responsibility for uploading and updating data on Kickboard.