The School Context

P.S. 811M is an elementary-middle school with 338 students from grade pre-k through grade 8. The school population comprises 43% Black, 50% Hispanic, 5% White, 1% Asian students and 1% American Indian. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 85% of the students enrolled and girls account for 15%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 86.0%.

School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<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>
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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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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### School Culture

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<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
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<th>Rating:</th>
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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>Well Developed</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

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<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
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<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>
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Area of Celebration

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
All teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, professional learning communities that consistently look at teacher practice, examine student work and analyze data. Embedded leadership structures ensure teachers have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact
The work of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) has resulted in student progress both academically and behaviorally. Teacher teams inform decisions regarding curricula, pedagogy, academic and behavioral interventions ensuring a shared commitment to attaining school goals.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has established a strategic PLC plan whereby, day 1 is grouped according to student population (standardized assessment and alternate assessment) and day 2 is grouped according to grade band. Each PLC has two distinct foci, inquiry work, such as identifying a challenging area and implementing intervention strategies, and collaborative teacher teams, who refine curriculum maps and ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts across all sites.

- Team members suggest collegial inter-visitations based on teachers' stated area of need to strengthen pedagogical practices. In addition, administration schedules mentoring and professional development opportunities. Teachers stated, “Initially the use of Webb’s (DOK) level 2/3 type questions was challenging”. Based on formal and informal observations, 84% of teachers have been successful (rated effective and highly effective in Advance) in improving their questioning and discussion techniques.

- The school uses the Tuning Protocol to analyze student work in addition to reflecting on teacher practice. The teacher teams ensure all tasks are rigorous and appropriately challenging thereby encouraging higher order thinking skills and the application of learning to real world problems. For example, student work samples presented at the team meeting demonstrated increases in writing stamina, the use of key vocabulary in content areas and understanding the concept of cause and effect. Overall, 37% of students achieved their targeted goal in English language arts, while 83% made progress towards goal.

- Leadership structures are embedded within the school’s day to day operation. During the teacher team meeting, teachers articulated how they are active members of the school community by serving as mentors, coaches, and liaisons between the school and community partners, providing workshops and choosing appropriate curriculum to meet students’ academic and social needs.

- Teacher teams identify a problem of practice and discuss academic and/or behavioral strategies and scaffolds. For example, the school developed their own Response to Intervention (RtI) System to support 15% of the students that did not buy into the school’s universal PBIS program. Teachers extended RtI to include intensive individual behavior support plans for identified students resulting in 63% of those students are progressing with their individual behavior plans as evidenced by teacher daily tracking sheets.
Findings
The school uses common assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula to determine student progress. Teachers check for understanding and provide actionable feedback.

Impact
School leaders and teachers have an ongoing understanding of the progress of all learners which effectively informs instructional practices at the team and classroom level. However, meaningful feedback, including from student self and peer assessment varies, limiting student awareness of their next steps.

Supporting Evidence
- Students in both 12:1:1 and 8:1:1 classes take the iReady online assessment three times yearly, which measure students’ literacy and mathematical skills. Teachers use this data to identify students’ area of need, establish class-wide instructional foci and form reading and math groups. However, in some classes teacher feedback to students was vague and not specific. For example, in a fourth grade class, feedback given was to “use more adjectives in your writing”. However, when I asked “What is an adjective?” the student could not reply. In another class, feedback given was to “use proper punctuation”.

- In alternate assessment classes, the Students Annual Needs Assessment Inventory (SANDI) is administered twice yearly which identifies students’ academic gaps and used to help generate Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. However, teachers and students referencing their learning goals throughout the instructional period vary.

- In all classrooms visited, portfolios include monthly collections of work samples in all content area subjects, assessment data which includes baseline, mid-year and intervention work samples and Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) that assesses the social-emotional competencies in kindergarten through the eighth grade. School leaders stated this assessment helps intervention planning and progress monitoring. However, a limited number of teachers could not articulate trends based on this data as seen throughout the school.

- Assessment results and student work samples are reviewed weekly as seen during a collaborative team meeting. The team uses the data to make adjustments to lessons such as additional guided group practice, increased modeling, or creating a timeline as a scaffold. During the small group meeting, students were able to tell me what they were learning today and why, however, not all students were able to say specifically what they needed to do to next to earn the “4” on their rubric.

- Across classrooms ongoing checks for understanding, as seen during class visits included 1:1 conferencing with classroom teacher, exit slips, checklists and rubrics that meet the cognitive level of students. During classroom visits students were given the time to self-assess and peer assess. However, early prompting by adults was seen in some classrooms.
Findings
All curricula are aligned to the Common Core and thoughtfully integrate the instructional shifts across all content area subjects. The school consistently presents rigorous tasks that engage all students to demonstrate their thinking.

Impact
The school’s curricula decisions made through the professional collaboration of school leaders and faculty build coherence across the school, support academic and social/emotional growth, while promoting college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence
- Units of study in all content area subjects including English language arts and math, are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts. Strategies such as developing text-based responses, building academic vocabulary and application to real world situations are stressed throughout the school. For example, in a fifth grade classroom, students were engaged in a lesson to understand the importance of the 1936 Olympics for African Americans and to explain the relationship between people and events (cause and effect). Students were asked complete a Cause/Effect graphic organizer using the book “Promises to Keep”.

- The school-wide instructional focus of “what are we learning today and why?” is incorporated into lessons as the aim and objective of the lesson. Teachers consistently posed these questions to students and encouraged them to demonstrate their thinking, thereby, embedding higher order thinking skills across all content area subjects. Teachers stated because of this focus, there is coherence across grades and subject areas.

- The school uses Essential for Living curriculum providing students with instruction in Applied Daily Living (ADL) skills and pre-vocational lessons to support the advancement of student independence and skills necessary for college and career readiness. For example, the school has established a real functioning 1940’s diner, Route 66, which is a multi-disciplinary program incorporating literacy, math, health/science, social studies and art. The diner is open for an hour and a half each day and serves lunch to the school staff and administration. Students learn about food preparation, food cost, sanitation, controlling waste, customer service skills and how to make a profit.

- Throughout all classrooms visited, rigorous habits are embedded into daily routines and lessons such as attending to task, making inferences and comparing and contrasting. The school has partnered with the New York Center for Autism, whereby behavioral therapists meet with teachers on a weekly basis to ensure students are cognitively engaged in challenging and meaningful content. For example in an 8:1:1 class for students with autism, students were reading the adapted book “We Beat the Street”. Students responded to questions such as, “When did this happen and how do you know?” and “What do you think will happen next?” thereby demonstrating their thinking processes.
Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy  
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Teaching practices reflect the school’s core belief system that students learn best when engaged in lessons that are hands-on, experiential, and differentiated with multiple entry points to promote critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Impact
Teacher ratings demonstrate an increase in the areas of student engagement and questioning and discussion techniques leading to a supportive learning environment that challenges students to create meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers utilize “Specific Consideration for Teachers of Students with Disabilities” as a resource guide to plan and reflect on their instruction practices, as well as Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. Specific elements such as grouping students by their cognitive and behavioral levels are examples of how students are grouped by need.

- Teachers use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) methodology in designing their lessons and instructional activities. Teachers’ lesson plans and classroom visits revealed the use of technology, Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, multi-sensory instruction that addresses learning styles, Picture Exchange Symbols (PEC) and flexible grouping determined by iReady data. In addition, teachers for students with autism use the TEACCH methodology of center-based rotations of whole group, small group and 1:1 independent workstations that provide individually tailored instruction to ensure all students are participating in appropriately challenging tasks.

- Students demonstrate their thinking and create meaningful work products. For example, in a middle school health/science 6:1:1 class, students viewed a clip on the SMARTboard, highlighting the various sections in a supermarket. Students were asked to identify (DOK level1), categorize (level 2), compare (level 3) and ultimately apply the concepts as a culminating task of creating a healthy shopping list. To support individual student needs, the lesson plan called for use of adapted level reading material, visual and verbal prompts, and PEC symbols.

- The school stresses the push-in model for related service providers. Classroom teachers collaborate with speech teachers developing more cognitively challenging questions for students with autism. In a 12:1:1 elementary classroom, students were reading Amelia Bedelia and discussed what it could mean to change the towels, demonstrating the understanding of the multiple meanings of words.

- Administration stated that “based on daily walkthroughs”, teachers have demonstrated improvement in designing coherent instruction (1e) and engaging students in learning (3c).
Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
High expectations are evident throughout the school organization via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DfT), producing a culture of mutual accountability. The school partners with parents and guardians to support student growth and independence towards college and career readiness.

Impact
School structures foster collaboration among school leaders, staff, parents and students to communicate a cohesive set of high expectations throughout the school community and successfully support students in achieving those goals.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are consistently communicated to staff through a variety of means, verbally and in writing, such as the staff handbook, instructional memos, emails and blogs. Administration consistently articulates high expectations during post-observations, collaborative team meetings, monthly faculty meetings, and conference days as stated by teachers during the teacher team meeting.

- Administrators provide ongoing professional development with regard to implementing best practices identified in the DfT with a focus on components 3b, 3c, and 3d. School leaders provide “next steps” during post-observations that are linked to the targeted components of the Danielson’s Framework. Administration and staff work as a team in planning high quality professional development workshops. Feedback collected from workshops and from teacher team meetings is used to inform future workshops and activities, ensuring a culture of mutual accountability.

- High expectations for classwork and behavior are modeled by teachers as seen in classrooms visited. Students are reminded of academic and social/emotional expectations for instruction as lessons are introduced. Students of the Week are recognized in every classroom. All classroom visited have “Respectful, Responsible, and Safe” (RRS) posters that contain specific examples of what that looks like in each environment of the school. Skills such as self-awareness and self-management are actively taught, thereby addressing college and career readiness skills.

- Sixty percent of students were moved to a Less Restricted Environment after the eighth grade. In addition, the school redesigned five alternate assessment classes from 6:1:1 to 8:1:1 in which students follow Engage NY Common Core aligned curriculum preparing students for college and career readiness.

- There is an emphasis on communication and partnerships with families. A parent stated there is consistent outreach and support from all staff members. “I always know what my child is going to learn in school. This helps me to help him”. Parents stated they receive detailed monthly reports and weekly point sheets which provide them with a clear picture of their child’s academic and behavioral progress towards college and career readiness expectations. Ongoing parent workshops play a significant role in augmenting partnerships with the school. Parents receive ongoing training by staff, coaches and outside agencies in topics such as positive behavior intervention and support, Medicaid service coordination and transition planning and preparing for adulthood.