Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Thom J. McCann Woodside

Middle School Q125

46-02 47 Avenue
Queens
NY 11377

Principal: Judy Mittler

Date of review: March 19, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Madelene Chan
Thom J. McCann is a middle school with 1,551 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 2% Black, 55% Hispanic, 5% White, and 37% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.5%.

## 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>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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>
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### School Culture

<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>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

<table>
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<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<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>
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### Area of Celebration

<table>
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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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</table>

#### Findings
School leaders ensure that teachers across content and grade levels engage in structured professional contributions. The principal has developed a distributive leadership structure where teachers co-facilitate team meetings.

#### Impact
As a result of teacher collaboration across grade and content area teams, there is school-wide coherence and increased achievement for all learners. Teachers are responsible for making key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

#### Supporting Evidence
- Vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum takes place at the teacher team level. English language arts (ELA) and Social Studies teachers plan together and create interdisciplinary units of study. Teachers collaborate and plan their meetings by using the protocol, *Team Instructional Focus to Look at Student Work* to assess students’ strengths and weaknesses. The result of this collaborative planning has yielded increased proficiency scores for all learners based on the I-Ready assessment in math. English language learners (ELLs) in grades 6 and 7 improved in math proficiency by 17% from the beginning of the year to the last assessment in February. Students also state that they appreciate the continuity across classrooms because “the tasks make sense and all expectations are clearly stated”.

- Teacher teams utilize a common agenda template and use Google drive to ensure that agendas and minutes are documented and available to all staff. The information gathered is used to revise the school’s professional development plan. For example, after careful review professional development was given in questioning and discussion to provide examples of higher order thinking and learning. As a result, students in seventh grade have improved in engagement and inquiry, both individually and in teams. Additionally, teachers agree that by using research based strategies from Q-Tel for English language learners, they are better able to track student progress, zero in on students’ needs and then offer an explicit diagnosis for achievement development.

- Teachers stated that they have a voice in selecting a framework for meetings and professional development opportunities. For example, one multiple content based team has engaged in developing and refining curricula so that all students have access to a cadre of strategies for improved learning. As a result, the lowest third of 8th graders have shown improvement in diagraming and narratives. Teachers agreed that writing skills have also blossomed with the assistance of the Writing Revolution program. Results indicate that academic vocabulary discussed during math by grouping “shades of meaning” have allowed students to achieve higher scores on topics like writing inequalities, plotting points and identifying and explaining coordinate planes.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
Pedagogy provides strong scaffolds to meet the needs of all sub-groups of students, including the use of strategic entry points, however, the use of extensions that foster deep reasoning in planned activities varies across the school.

Impact
Across classrooms, multiple strategies to support students in producing meaningful work products is in place, yet there are pockets of lessons that offer limited opportunities to capture the level of independence and ownership that is reflective of the school’s high level of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- While conversations with students indicated that student support is offered in all content areas, some lessons did not fully challenge students or offer the ability for students to work in groups through a project-based approach. Although student discussions involved high level work around vertical and horizontal plotting of points on a graph, solving algebraic equations and using “fix-up” strategies like sentence starters, guided questions and video clips to identify the main idea of a science experiment, some lessons involved the sole experience of working on a worksheet. For example, students who are scheduled for regents testing were working on complex problems in math and were diligently applying their prior knowledge, but opportunities for more creative learning were limited.

- Across classrooms, teacher practices reference and support school-wide beliefs about how students learn best and staff can articulate how those beliefs are informed by a common, research-based framework, aligned to curricula and adjusted by teacher team input. A school-wide adoption of the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) provides students with individual roles in facilitating their learning. Students stated that they benefit from this method because they “learn better when they are in charge of the lesson.” One strategy from this process is the “clunk master”. The role of this individual is to identify all new words and provide meanings. As a result of CSRs success, according to data from Achieve 3000, an on-line literacy assessment, Lexile levels have grown from 2.7 in September to 4.8 in March, school-wide.

- Strategic use of scaffolding techniques like modeling, small groups, activating prior knowledge, effective use of graphic organizers, visuals and imagery, technology and building academic vocabulary provides multiple entry points to the lesson and tasks for students across the school. In one classroom, students with disabilities were deconstructing text using grade level literacy. When asking students how this strategy helps them strengthen their reading one student replied, “I am able to go back to the story, re-read the words and then look for the prefix, suffix or root word to find the answer”. Another student said, “I look for fix-up strategies and then enter the corrections onto my graphic organizer so I can write my story”.

**Additional Findings**

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

All curricula throughout the content areas are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and showed evidence of strategic integration of the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are consistently emphasized and embedded for all learners across the grades and subject areas.

**Impact**

The school’s choices of supports and curricular decisions develop progress building steps and college and career readiness for all students. Across grades and subject areas all students are encouraged to use the skills they have learned to accomplish tasks.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Through the use of close reading, teachers implement researched based strategies like sentence prompts and visual cues aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, which enable students to use evidence to support their thinking in discussion, writing, and problem solving. Students have developed communication skills and persistence through grappling with complex text that support college and career readiness. Evidence of these developments indicated that there is school wide improvement in rigor through student discussion and writing, as measured by Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) scores, formative and informative assessments with common rubrics, and teacher observations.

- Social studies and science teachers collaborate with English language arts (ELA) and ELL teachers and implement strategies of close reading and Judith Hochman’s “Writing Revolution” to align the instructional needs of students, with particular attention to ELLs and students with disabilities. Presently, there has been an increase in students’ writing levels indicated through baseline assessments evaluated by a common rubric. ELLs have improved in identifying main idea, or the “gist of a text”, by more than 45% from pre to post test, school-wide.

- In order to implement the instructional shifts the school crafted its instructional focus to include an emphasis on close reading and text-based evidence research, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers use close reading strategies through the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) Framework. The school has also implemented a basic writing program called Writing Revolution. It provides teachers with instructional strategies for the development of written language and offers specific techniques to add structure, coherence, and clarity to students’ expository and narrative writing. Results of this program indicated that there is consistent growth in benchmark writing pieces. Specifically, students with disabilities in grade six have shown improvements in stating textual evidence and stating a claim. Additionally, the MyOn Reading, on-line book program, has encouraged all students to read daily and data shows that 655 students have read 4,321 books since the initiation of the process.
Findings
The school consistently uses common assessments in all subject areas, tracks student progress and has a succinct routine to check for understanding.

Impact
The school’s systems to track and monitor progress through careful data analysis, during instruction, as well as students’ self-assessments are used daily to guide adjustments in units and tasks to meet students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Increased ELL and students with disabilities sub-group populations have led to intervention strategies to increase comprehension in literacy and academic language. The following programs have yielded positive results. Blitz and Boost for decoding skills has shown that in January ELLs were decoding at a 36% proficiency rate and in March at a 66% proficiency rate. Similarly, the I-Ready assessment for math indicates that 30% of students with disabilities were proficient in numbers and operations, algebraic thinking and measurement in October and February data showed an increase of 22% proficiency scores.

- The needs of ELLs and students with disabilities are being met by providing both co-teaching and self-contained models. After analyzing data, long term ELLs were invited to attend a specialized morning tutoring program to address the modalities specific to their needs. Results of this program indicated that 75% of students improved in 3 out of 5 skills taught. Furthermore, cross content curriculum for accelerated students provide students with the opportunity to have completed four regents and a New York State Foreign Language Proficiency exam. Regent scores for this school show that 100% of students pass the regents exams.

- Teachers are providing scaffolding and support such as small group instruction, conferencing, and workstations while encouraging students to choose more challenging work. Teachers have daily reflections regarding their lessons and continue to update diary maps showing a progression of lessons and the changes that were made based on student data. Teachers allow students to demonstrate their level of understanding and mastery of topics throughout their lessons. At the end of each lesson, students are responsible for completing an end of lesson assessment. Students speak about next steps fluidly, referring to their notes, teachers’ comments and peer reviews. The data from each lesson is compiled in the Teacher Assessment Notebook (TANs) and used for future lessons. This structure has increased differentiation in lessons and has had positive impact on Danielson’s indicator to create coherent curriculum.
Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
High expectations are consistently shared with staff through the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school’s website. Technology programs and workshops keep families aware of school goals and student progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact
Staff, students and their families benefit from the structures that support the school’s high expectations through accountability and shared dedication towards the school. This provides actionable plans towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides students with opportunities to have access to all support staff, increase individual high school articulation meetings with guidance counselors, and expand student government meetings with the administration. Parents expressed that they were grateful that the school celebrates the arts and that students are exposed to music theory, art and theatre during specialized club periods. Parents also appreciate the social/emotional support that is provided by the entire staff and believe the school is the “best middle school in Queens”.

- The school has increased the use of social media, e-mail, and written publications, such as an elaborate and informative school website and translated letters about school happenings to expand outreach to parents to improve their understanding and participation in their children’s education. Policy-making decisions have also improved by expanding the school website to include monthly School Leadership Team (SLT) minutes, upcoming news and events, and high school applications and information. The school is implementing Skedula/Pupil path, an on-line resource to make students’ grades available to parents in real time, parent workshops that provide information on the importance of exam expectations to meet the Common Core Learning Standards, as well as post-secondary preparation and high school readiness. As a result of this intensive level of communication, parents and students feel well-informed and respected by the staff and students own their progress as a result of the level of responsibility that is given to students regarding their learning.

- Feedback from classroom visits, inter-visitations with peers as lead teachers and frequent classroom observations hold staff accountable for meeting expectations. Teachers posit that feedback offers ways to improve practices and expand their toolkit of strategies in the content areas. One successful professional development on questioning and discussion created an increase of improvement in this area across content areas. There is a clear system and criteria in place, including an analysis of student and teachers’ data and work products, used for resource management decisions.