Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies
High School X297
1110 Boston Road
Bronx
NY 10456

Principal: Matthew Mazzaroppi

Dates of review: December 10, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Carron Staple
The School Context

Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies is a high school with 471 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 27% Black, 72% Hispanic, 0% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English Language Learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 78.4%.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Quality Criteria</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Core</strong></td>
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<td>To what extent does the school regularly...</td>
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<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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<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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<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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<td><strong>School Culture</strong></td>
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<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<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>Proficient</td>
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<td><strong>Systems for Improvement</strong></td>
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<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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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>Additional Findings</td>
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Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings
School leaders and faculty strategically integrate the instructional shifts, design coherent curricula aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and provide entry points and access for a variety of learners to ensure students are cognitively engaged.

Impact
All students, including lowest to highest achievers, English Language Learners (ELLs), and Students with Disabilities (SWDs), all grades and content areas, are consistently provided with rigorous high-level tasks that require them to explain, demonstrate, synthesize, and apply their thinking. Students receive a variety of supports that give them access to the curricula and prepare them for college and careers.

Supporting Evidence
- The school has created Common Core aligned curriculum, unit maps, and lesson plan templates that have been used by virtually every teacher as a result of the school's vision to "collaboratively work with evidence" to make teaching and learning student-centered, rigorous, and relevant. Teachers accomplish this by looking at student work, analyzing data, and providing peer feedback for every course across every grade level to ensure standards are embedded and that there are multiple entry points that provide access for all students to engage in the work.

- Every lesson plan reviewed shows evidence of higher-order thinking skills and engagement of students being consistently emphasized. Teachers plan their lessons in alignment with the school's instructional focus with an emphasis on developing writing stamina with the use of claims and counter claims, citing evidence from a variety of sources and making real-world connections and applications.

- Translanguaging strategies are included in all curricula to build linguistic strength of English Language Learners and provide multiple opportunities and entry points for all students to be actively engage, participate, and become more fluent. A translanguaging strategy observed in a 12th grade Participation in Government Class was English Language Learners (ELLs) sitting in groups with non-ELL students collaborating around creating a claim. Students discussed the claim, at times in their native language for clarity and comprehension, and then wrote about it with the understanding that the entire group would eventually have to come to consensus in order to create a thesis statement. Translanguaging is student-centered and provides opportunities for students to discuss, reflect, negotiate and debrief on content in whatever language they choose, but with the understanding that what they present to their group or the class will be in English.
Area of Focus

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

Findings
Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reveal a set of beliefs about how students learn best, leveraged by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and multiple entry points of entry. Students engage in challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking as evidenced by their discussions and work products.

Impact
Across classrooms, various strategies including scaffolds for all students consistently lead to entry points that promote deep thinking and reasoning, so that all learners including the school's subgroups have numerous opportunities to participate and produce meaningful work.

Supporting Evidence
- Across the school, teachers share a set of beliefs about how students learn best and support all students including English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities with pedagogy rooted in experiential learning, language and content integration and collaboration. ELL and Special Education teachers make recommendations and necessary accommodations to increase student engagement and participation for students at varying learning levels and all teachers use the Carousel strategy with fidelity to ensure instruction and assessment are student-centered with timely feedback. However, a great deal of class time is spent on the carousel strategy because it has to pass three separate student hands for feedback before it is returned to the original owner, thus limiting the time for the entire class to share out as whole group what their findings were or discuss how the strategy helped them to write better or dig deeper into the text. While this student-centered strategy is commendable and leads to reflective and meaningful work products, an area of focus to consider would be to shorten the carousel process allowing more time for teacher-directed support if needed, especially since ELLs are receiving modifications through translanguaging and students with disabilities are receiving extra supports such as graphic organizers, dictionaries, varying texts of mixed Lexile levels and one on one time with teachers.

- In a grade 9 English Language Arts class, students were provided with a cautionary tale and had to map out protagonist and antagonistic pre-writing perspectives to determine how sociological factors, including physiology and psychology affect the story's plot and the conflict between characters. Students had to brainstorm in groups, use a graphic organizer and a rubric to develop an organized writing draft and share their thinking with their peers. This student-centered pre-writing task allowed students to show their understanding and knowledge of plot structure, character analysis and conflict, while the exit ticket provided all students with the opportunity to discuss the process and any challenges they faced in completing the task.

- Across classrooms, bilingual dictionaries, graphic organizers, sentence starters, question prompts, purposeful groups, teacher questioning and circulation among students, as well as the MACS peer review structure are utilized and provide further extensions and support so all students have multiple entry points and access, creating 100% engagement and participation.
Additional Findings

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Well Developed |

**Findings**
Across classrooms, teachers use common assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. The data the school captures is used to determine if students are progressing toward their goals across all grades and subjects.

**Impact**
Timely and effective adjustments are made to the curriculum to meet students' needs. Periodic assessments, projects-based learning, and rubrics provide actionable feedback to students making them aware of their progress and next steps for achievement.

**Supporting Evidence**

- As a projects-based school, the curriculum is aligned with rigorous projects across all content areas. Teachers design these projects for panel and roundtable presentations that are connected to projects-based assessment. Students are required to present their projects to a panel of administrators and department teams where they are evaluated based on a specific rubric. Assessment progress in this area is updated after each cycle of presentations and available to students and their families to see the grading policy, assessment results and next steps for improvement on Pupil Path, which is the school-wide online grading system.

- Some common school-wide assessments include, project-based learning assessment, periodic assessments, peer assessment and midterms and finals. For five years, the school has utilized a system of periodic assessments to monitor student progress and specific standards in content area skills. Teachers administer, score, and analyze data in 3-4 Design Your Own (DYO) cycles per year. DYO assessments are aligned with MOSL assessments to increase the benefits of the information without increasing the number of assessments students are required to take. Significant gains in student participation and achievement are evident as indicated in the DYO Data reports from every department. For example, the growth report from the social studies department shows evidence that as the students became more engaged in the strategies, their skills over four cycles of assessment improved in claim, citing textual evidence, document integration, elaboration and analysis, counterclaims, organization and conventions.

- Formative assessments for learning are embedded throughout all lessons and do not just come at the end of a lesson. The school has determined that if students are not understanding the daily work, they will not be able to succeed on exams, therefore strategies such as reflective writing, summarizing the aim, hinge point questions, post-its to collect qualitative data from focused questions and exit tickets are utilized, resulting in student self-reflection and on the spot adjustments from teachers to meet student needs. One specific strategy observed that must be noted, is the Peer Assessment Carousel Strategy where students pass their papers around to three different students who add comments and support based on a specific rubric that requires students to show command of evidence. The feedback students receive from their peers helps them to improve their responses by obtaining more evidence from the text to convey their arguments or responses.
Quality Indicator: 3.4 High Expectations  Rating: Proficient

Findings
School leaders, teachers, and support staff maintain a culture for learning that communicates high expectations connected to a path towards college and career readiness. All students and families are provided with detailed feedback and ongoing guidance supports and mentorships.

Impact
Instructional and collaborative support among staff, students and families fosters high expectations for all students and prepares students for college and beyond.

Supporting Evidence
- The principal and other school leaders are explicit about high expectations and communicate these expectations via bulletin boards, panels and roundtable presentations where students demonstrate their mastery of learning, the staff handbook that includes "Principles To Realize Our Vision"- one part of a professional handbook outlining expectations of the professional community, as well as monthly newsletters, and assemblies and workshops for students and their families. Students and their families speak highly of the school and the consistent and frequent communication received concerning academic and social-emotional support. Parents discussed attending multiple parent and school leadership team meetings, and appreciate the open door policy at the school and the multiple opportunities to engage in their children's learning and progress.

- School leaders and teachers support students in meeting high expectations and preparing for college and beyond. There are dedicated guidance counselors from the school and New York University as well as other support staff who regularly provide feedback to students on their path toward graduation and their post high school plans. Students have access to City of University (CUNY) prep courses called AT Home in CUNY for Math and English Language Arts, College Now, Advanced Placement classes and a variety of college trips and workshops.

- All Grade 9 students are part of a Freshman Focus Team where they meet together to "lunch and learn" with opportunities to have structured time with teachers for enrichment and extra support with coursework. Through strategic partnerships, the schools hosts the "Morris Academy Mentors" in association with the Hope for New York that pairs students with volunteer mentors who provide personal support as well as insight and exposure into a variety of professional fields. The "Support Our Seniors" program matches seniors with teacher mentors from the school who monitor their academic progress and trajectory toward graduation.
Findings
All teachers are engaged in consistently examining teacher practice and student data within inquiry-based structured professional development. Teacher leadership via coaches, master teachers and department leads are embedded across all areas of the school.

Impact
School-wide instructional coherence is seen throughout all classrooms and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect teaching and learning across the school, resulting in data-informed adjustments that meet students’ needs as evidenced by increased scores in DYO rubric categories across all subgroups.

Supporting Evidence
- Teacher teams use a variety of data to inform their instruction following an inquiry process that includes the following 5 stages: Aspire, Acquire/Apply, Administer, Analyze and Adjust. Individually and in teams, teachers analyze data from DYO assessments, Regents, and school-wide instructional strategies learned in professional learning sessions. Teachers develop professional portfolios which is a collection of all of their assessment and analysis work and share them on an internal school website with their colleagues. All teachers are held consistently accountable for sharing best practices and data that informs their planning, instruction and assessment.

- During a team meeting, teachers were analyzing qualitative and quantitative data from a Design Your Own (DYO) assessment for the purpose of determining if the student work from the first Carousel (a carousel is one round of an assessment that takes place in 5 week cycles) required them to make instructional adjustments. Teachers specifically discussed where students seemed to struggle the most and whether or not certain trends among student responses were a result of a lack of prompts or the way the questions were designed.

- Distributive leadership can be seen throughout the school in the form of lead teachers and coaches, model teachers, department leaders, school team leaders, who lead by example and allow their classrooms to be models of best practice. Teachers seeking administrative positions are also welcomed to apprentice with school administrators to learn how organizational and instructional systems are created and aligned to meet the needs of all students. An example of this distributive leadership in practice is student-centered programming, where all leaders look individually at student transcripts and other data to determine which courses students should be programmed for and with specific teachers.