Quality Review Report

2019-2020

Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School
Secondary School 28Q167
91-30 Metropolitan Avenue
Queens
NY 11375

Co- Principals: Patrick Finley and Damon McCord

Dates of Review:
November 14, 2019 - November 15, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Daniel Kim
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School serves students in grade 6 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to State standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</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 State standards and the 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 Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate schoolwide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to State standards</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: Well Developed |

Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is driven by a research-based theory of action, and students have a meaningful voice affecting school improvement. The Crew advisory structures support student development of academic and personal behaviors.

Impact

School efforts result in a safe school environment and inclusive culture that support progress toward the school’s goals. Each student is known well and is supported by coordinated social-emotional learning, advisement and guidance resulting in personal and academic growth.

Supporting Evidence

- The school community’s efforts for culture-building emphasize belonging, self-belief, growth through effort, and meaningful work. The theory of action is that by consistently emphasizing these academic mindsets, then student engagement and persistence necessary to achieve mastery will increase. The application of this theory of action is consistently evident across the school through the Crew advisory program, core values encompassed in Habits of Work and Learning, and meaningful, higher-order thinking student work in the curriculum. For example, students are encouraged to take chances as a learner, with academic risk taking and learning from failures driving student success. This is evident in student work products, such as culminating projects in which different demonstrations of mastery and student-directed projects are celebrated. Parents, staff, and students unanimously agreed that the school community fosters a safe and respectful climate in which students’ social, emotional, physical and academic needs are readily addressed by school efforts.

- Student advocacy and empowerment, a part of the core values of the school, are evident in the interdisciplinary units and case studies. Students apply these values to meaningfully initiate and guide school improvement efforts and have an impact on school decision-making. Female grade-nine students noted that some of their male peers were using disrespectful language in casual conversations, and advocated for time and space to be able to openly address and discuss these issues. This has led to a schoolwide curriculum change in the Crew advisory program, through revised case studies, delving deeply into sexual harassment and gender discrimination current events to equip students with the skills to recognize and act on discriminatory language and actions, at school and in society at large.

- The Crew advisement structure strategically aligns guidance, advisement and social-emotional learning for all students. In groups no larger than 16, students meet daily with a Crew advisor for learning experiences that emphasize character learning targets, known as Habits of Work and Learning. The Crew advisor serves as the point teacher for not only student social-emotional learning, but also for family partnerships, attendance follow up, guidance, and advisement towards college and career readiness. All incoming grade-six students participate in multiple opportunities to build peer and teacher relationships, including Crew orientation, a four-day backpacking course. Students related how Crew is a space in which students support each other through positive energy, yet also have a chance to learn that “everyone is struggling with the same issues” that they share and grapple with together. According to schoolwide surveys conducted at the beginning and end of year, students report double-digit percentage increases on every indicator including those regarding self-regulation, motivation, collaboration and communication skills due to Crew.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

School faculty use common assessments such as mock Regents and literacy assessments to determine student progress toward goals. School leaders and teachers are working to hone their assessment practices to create a clear picture of student mastery and progress across grades and subjects.

Impact

Students receive actionable, yet not always meaningful, feedback about their performance. Assessment results are used to adjust curricula and instruction, but has not yet resulted in all students, including students with disabilities and Multilingual Learners (MLLs), demonstrating increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Through school assessment practices, students described receiving actionable feedback about their performance through rubric scores, written and oral peer and teacher feedback that gave them a sense of accomplishment and an understanding of where they need to improve. Some students described receiving meaningful and specific feedback that they have been able to apply across content areas. One student, for example, noted that he had forgotten to justify his evidence in his chemistry scientific argument assignment. Teacher feedback included not only clear ways to improve, but also concrete suggestions utilizing the project example and ways to make connections to his main idea. He described how he has remembered the feedback and applied it to various other content-area case studies, so that his perspective is clear to the audience. However, this level of meaningfulness to the student and ownership of the feedback was not evident across all student interviews.

- School leaders and teachers use common assessments, such as the State English Language Arts (ELA) and math tests, mock Regents exams in the various departments, as well as culminating projects to identify trends and patterns regarding student performance and provide actionable feedback to teachers in identifying instructional next steps. For example, school leaders and teachers noted that while these assessment practices identify student performance and mastery of various skills and content knowledge, there was a need to supplement their practices with a critical thinking rubric that would assess and track students’ performance and growth over time across grades and subjects. Such a rubric would assess student application of identifying and explaining key issues, evaluating evidence from multiple sources, understanding how context and assumptions have an impact on thinking, acknowledging multiple perspectives, and understanding implications. Students are to be evaluated in their case study and unit culminating projects across grades and content areas. This schoolwide effort would complete a clear portrait of student mastery across the grades and content areas as the school year continues, but is not yet complete.

- Teachers utilize common assessments to make adjustments to their instruction and curricula. For example, grade-seven teachers analyzed student reading Lexile levels to identify potential access barriers that would hamper full engagement in student discussions around bias. Instructional modifications based on data included the use of texts at multiple Lexile levels, pre-teaching and previewing anticipated challenging vocabulary, as well as offering multiple ways that students can demonstrate their mastery and understanding in their culminating project. While such adjustments to instruction and curricula were evident across the school, there was no evidence that all students, including MLLs and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery due to these adjustments based on common assessments.
## Additional Finding

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are strategically aligned to State standards, and emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills through coherent interdisciplinary units and culminating projects.

**Impact**

The coherent interdisciplinary curricula, across grades and content areas, promotes college and career readiness, and ensure that all students must demonstrate their thinking.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Unit and lesson plans show alignment to content-specific State standards. Teachers and school leaders make strategic adjustments based on student achievement data from multiple sources, such as mock Regents exam, student reading levels, and through teacher-team application of the Looking at Student Work protocol. Standards-Targets-Assessments maps for all grades and content areas provide evidence of a balance between literary and non-fiction texts, along with the consistent integration of the requirement for students to evaluate the quality of texts and use text-based evidence in support of their arguments. Across grade levels, unit plans in math and science include tasks that ask students to reason abstractly and concretely as they show their thinking in multiple ways and apply their thinking in real-world situations. Across all content areas and grades, planned instructional tasks focus attention on students engaging in collaborative discussions in one-to-one, in small- and whole-group settings.

- Higher-order skills are emphasized in all curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent fashion within interdisciplinary units called Expeditions, with Case Studies within units serving as specific content focal points. For example, grade-ten teachers collaboratively planned a grade-wide Expedition centered on the idea of possession. The first Case Study titled “Cobalt: The New Gold?” directed student learning experiences around this single issue. Plans for a Chemistry class included students using the element cobalt to not only explore physical and chemical properties of matter and conduct labs on chemical reactions, but also to consider their own consumption patterns that utilize cobalt in their daily lives. Plans for a Global History class include examining issues of mineral exploration and exploitation, colonial practices in the past and present in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a major source of cobalt and other valuable minerals. Through such interdisciplinary Expeditions across all grades and content areas, plans reference, apply and embed real-world situations for students to apply and extend their learning thus, promoting college and career readiness skills for all students.

- Across grades and content areas, planned tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits through Expedition and Case Study culminating projects to support student cognitive engagement, foster student ownership, and encourage students to demonstrate their thinking. Examples of culminating tasks include: a cross-literary synthesis project of worker conditions in the meatpacking industry and in *Esperanza Rising* in grade six; an anthology of current-day activist profiles in grade eight; critiques and creation of political cartoons reflecting European and American colonial practices in Africa during the 19th century in grade ten; the creation of a sustainability study for a local borough town to foster resiliency in the face of climate change in grade twelve. Such rigorous projects along with planned scaffolds, student-group discussion supports and research guidance were embedded in a coherent way across grades and content areas so that all learners must demonstrate their thinking.
Additional Finding

### Quality Indicator:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
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### Rating:

Well Developed

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies, such as the use of small-group instruction, tiered student work, content and discussion scaffolds, strategically provide multiple entry points and meaningful extensions for all learners into the curricula, work products and discussions.

### Impact

A variety of learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks, demonstrate higher-order thinking skills, participation, and ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across the vast majority of classes, teaching strategies, such as small-group or independent instruction, tiered student work, visual, discussion and content scaffolds, provide multiple entry points for a variety of learners into challenging work and student-to-student discussions. Students in a grade-eight social studies lesson analyzed and made claims about the effectiveness of non-violent protests, using examples of the Selma, Montgomery protests and the experiences of Nat Turner. Students made choices for three different levels of warm-up questions at varying levels of complexity, ranging from tactic comparisons, level of success, and evaluating the efficacy of non-violent protests in general. As students began synthesizing and developing their own arguments, the teacher displayed student responses from the previous day’s exit ticket to foster students seeing different perspectives, and deepen their analysis as part of the lesson. Some students utilized key-word and ideas-reference scaffolds on non-violent protests, while others deepened their analysis with challenging extensions to utilize and reference landmark legislation, critical actors, and key events as part of their justifications whether or not the Selma, Montgomery marchers would have been as effective if they had not taken non-violent means of protest.

- High school students in a Physics class worked to identify forces at an angle, and how those forces impact the stability of a stationary object. Based on both student self-assessment and teacher assessment of their level of understanding and mastery on the previous session’s work, students worked in partnerships and independently on differentiated tasks with varying levels of embedded scaffolds, including visual supports to draw angled vectors. Students who self-identified at a proficient level worked on a problem that continued to support their mastery; students who self-identified as being on an expert level worked on an extension to apply their thinking in a different context; the teacher worked with students who had struggled with the concept in a small group to support student-led discussion and articulation of where their misconceptions and challenges exist, and to offer targeted feedback and support to individuals.

- Grade-eleven students began their Algebra 2/Trigonometry lesson working on a tiered and differentiated problem proving whether a certain equational identity is true, and whether or not there is a “hole” in a given equation. Students worked on differentiated problem sets based on previous day’s exit ticket, and supported with embedded “hints,” and references toward their work. Students were heard discussing with partners their various problem-solving strategies, examining each other’s work to be able to understand not only their peers’ thinking, but also to identify where their own misconceptions lie to be successful in solving the problem. Other students were observed referencing their notes and previous work to be able to help them algebraically identify the removable discontinuity of a limit. Such student work products and discussions, reflecting high levels of participation and ownership, were evident across the vast majority of the classrooms.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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</table>

Findings

School leaders and teachers consistently communicate instructional high expectations to all staff through individual, grade and department meetings. School staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all through individualized guidance and advisement.

Impact

Teachers share a culture of mutual accountability for interdisciplinary instructional expectations. All students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Through individual and team discussions at grade- and department- planning meetings, school leaders and teacher leaders set high expectations related to instruction, planning and professional collaborations. In addition to feedback on their instructional practice, informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, all teachers receive professional development (PD) support aligned to their needs and interests. Teacher teams consistently collaborate through a schoolwide online platform that is used to develop interdisciplinary curricula, content-based case studies around specific issues, lesson plans, materials, plans for differentiation, and culminating projects. Interviewed teachers stated that such interdisciplinary collaboration has been the foundation of the culture and instructional philosophy since school inception and results in a sense of shared trust, collaboration and accountability.

- Staff members communicate expectations that prepare students for the next level through a variety of means, including the schoolwide grading policy and consistent use of content-specific rubrics that are aligned across grades. Students are given advisement and guidance from teachers and staff, such as high school and college application and information sessions and school selection assistance meetings. In an advisement structure called Crew, students themselves are tasked in outlining interests, identifying schools, mapping concrete steps to be successful candidates for those schools, and holding themselves and peers accountable for putting those steps into action.

- Interviewed students across grade bands described how they receive feedback from not only teachers, but also peers in a variety of embedded programs in preparation for their next steps. For example, students across both the middle and high school bands spoke of their culminating grade-eight presentation, in which they exhibit their middle school body of work to teachers and high school students, and receive feedback and next steps that support their transition to the next level. One student shared how an eleventh-grade student noted his challenges in social studies in his grade-eight presentation, informed him that high school can be a fresh start to apply himself in the content area, as well as concrete ways to synthesize multiple sources of information into a coherent argument. Students with varied needs unanimously related that they have been able to utilize such guidance from teachers and peers in preparation for their next level.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development
Rating: Well Developed

Findings

Teacher teams, such as grade, department and Crew, systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work. Distributed leadership structures such as coaches, team leaders, and model classrooms, are embedded throughout the school.

Impact

The work of teacher teams result in shared improvements in instructional practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. There is effective teacher leadership and teachers play an integral role in key decisions such as determining the instructional foci that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers conduct inquiry into their practice within grade, Crew, or cross-graded department teams, utilizing student work to guide their inquiry and revise their respective work plans to hone instructional practice. For example, grade-seven teachers met as a grade-level inquiry team to examine student Lexile levels, notice patterns and trends and to discuss and plan for instructional modifications so that students are able to better access concepts within the grade’s interdisciplinary unit and case study on bias. Teachers across content areas noted that some of the students who are performing at or above mastery in math still struggled in their literacy assessments, and noted that despite their challenge were still able to interpret questions in specific content areas well. Teachers then met in pairs to identify what they noticed for individual and groups of students, as well as plan for specific instructional adjustments to have an impact on student outcomes. Generated ideas were then incorporated in lesson plans, including creating entry points through numerous images and texts, building from personal experiences on bias, creating opportunities for close readings through annotations and vocabulary previews.

- Artifacts from a grade-twelve teacher inquiry team include notes on the development and implementation of a collaboration rubric as part of the students’ Advanced Placement Capstone performance task. Within the culminating project, students were tasked to conduct research that would outline conditions for a city’s success or failure, and articulate positions on how to apply their research in reimagining New York City. Meeting minutes include teachers noticing patterns and trends on how students interacted in research groups, and discussing instructional modifications based on student work, including focusing on specific rubric elements such as discussing alternating perspectives, synthesizing student peer contributions. Such systematic inquiry results in mastery of goals for groups of students. The graduation rate for grade-twelve students for the 2018-2019 school year is at 95 percent, with significantly higher graduation rates for Black (26 percent higher than city average), Hispanic (28 percent), and students with disabilities (44 percent) than that of New York City high school students in general.

- Teachers play integral leadership roles as grade, Crew leaders, or facilitators within the cross-graded department teams, making key decisions for the school community. Teacher leaders within the instructional leadership team conduct classroom observations walkthroughs, evaluate curriculum plans, review and analyze assessment and survey data to make decisions for school improvement. Teacher peers also serve as model classroom hosts to demonstrate best practices on coherent unit and lesson planning, strong student-to-student interactions or fostering student higher-order thinking, as well as assessment and social-emotional learning practices. Through these structures, teachers have an impact not only on high expectations for instruction, but also schoolwide improvement efforts by crafting the annual instructional foci on character, high-quality work and mastery of knowledge and skills.