



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Maria Teresa**

**Middle School M319**

**21 Jumel Place  
Manhattan  
NY 10032**

**Principal: Ysidro Abreu**

**Date of review: January 12, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Cheryl McClendon**

## The School Context

Maria Teresa is a middle school with 608 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 5% Black, 93% Hispanic, and 1% White. The student body includes 31% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.8%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, curricula-aligned common assessments, teachers use rubrics and grading policies to provide meaningful and actionable feedback to students.

### Impact

Data yielded from common assessments illuminate student progress towards goals across subjects and grades and inform curricular and instructional modifications that result in increased mastery for all students. Rubrics provide scaffolds for student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms content specific and procedural rubrics are strategically used to scaffold student work in all core subject areas. For example, the TREES rubric is used to scaffold reading responses. “TREES” stands for 1. Topic, title 2. Restate and answer the question 3. Evidence 4. Explain 5. Sum it up. Students were observed using the TREES rubric in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade science class as they summarized key details of an article on the importance of carbon dioxide in soda. Another example is the “Turn and Talk” rubric, which is a procedural checklist for accountable talk norms during “turn and talk” sessions. During the visit teachers were observed using the Turn and Talk rubric to monitor the content relevance and participation within student dialogue. Immediate feedback was provided.
- During the student interview several students shared that their teachers give them “a lot of feedback based on the rubric”. Students receive feedback in the form of “Glows” and “Grows” on their assignments and projects. Students explained how they use the “Grow” feedback that teachers provide on their Cycle A writing drafts to make revisions for the Cycle B final drafts.
- The principal shared that item-skills analysis of the New York State English Language Arts exam revealed a deficit in argumentative essay writing. In response to the data, teacher teams have shifted and modified the Code X units to place greater emphasis on this genre.
- School leaders and teacher teams analyze performance-based assessments and student data to determine the “best standard”, which is the standard that the highest percentage of students on a grade mastered, and the “standard in need of improvement” within each grade. Students who perform below standard are scheduled for Friday skills clinic intervention classes. In addition, within the core curricula, teachers regularly confer with students and document their analyses in conference logs. Teachers also analyze data from conference logs to inform instructional modifications and identify students in need of skills clinic tier 2 intervention supports.
- For every unit of study, each student’s performance in the specific learning objectives is graphed and monitored for progress by the classroom teacher and teacher teams. In addition, the school has met target performance in all areas, reflecting increased mastery in English language arts and math for all identified subgroups.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are informed by the instructional shifts and the Danielson Framework for Teaching, as well as by teacher team and school wide dialogue around beliefs about how students learn best. Although these classrooms reflect teachers providing strategic entry points comprising scaffolds, interventions and extensions to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged with tasks that elicit high-level critical thinking, there remains continual focus on pedagogical practice to ensure that these effective practices are fully implemented in every classroom throughout the school.

### Impact

Implementation of the instructional shift and practices reflecting the school's beliefs about how students learn best support high-level critical thinking in the vast majority of classrooms.

### Supporting Evidence

- Math and literacy units comprise a series of two-week instructional cycles. During Week A, teachers implement the “Explicit Teaching” model to teach Common Core-aligned skills and concepts. In math, at the end of Week A, students are given a performance-based assessment wherein they analyze samples of other students’ math problem-solving work to identify errors and misconceptions and make any necessary corrections. In literacy, at the end of week A, students either produce a writing draft within the focal genre or complete a Common Core-aligned portfolio task. Teachers check the Week A submission and provide feedback. During Week B, students are grouped in ability-based dyads or triads to revise the work. Teachers provide assessment-driven targeted guidance and support to groups.
- Teacher implementation of the explicit teaching model was observed across the vast majority of classrooms visited. For example, in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class, the teacher began the literacy/social studies session with a review of the key vocabulary in the central text. The teacher also guided students through the setup of the Cornell Note Taking template. During the independent work period students engaged in mixed-ability literature circles groups as they discussed and provided evidence from the text while the teacher circulated to “teach in” and take anecdotal notes. Although the explicit teaching model was observed across classrooms, there remains continual focus on pedagogical practice to ensure that this and all highly-effective pedagogical practices are fully implemented in every classroom throughout the school.
- In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class, students worked in collaborative, heterogeneous groups to critique three given hypotheses by identifying their strengths and limitations. Each student had a role. In one group, a student with special needs was designated as the note-taker; while another student was designated to define challenging vocabulary and other were focused on analysis of the hypotheses. The teacher circulated among the eight groups to provide guidance and monitor student participation using a checklist.
- As observed in an integrated co-teaching class and a 12:1 class, the teacher provided illustrated definitions of challenging vocabulary words on the interactive white board and a tactile activity that engaged students in analyzing the number-based prefixes of multi-syllabic words and representing them visually using varied media. During the debriefing session the principal noted the scaffolds that the teacher provided.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Strategic curricula decisions made by school leaders and faculty have resulted in coherence and alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and an integration of the instructional shifts.

### Impact

Across grades and subjects, the school's coherent curricula and academic tasks engage all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, in rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills and promote college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses the Glencoe Math curriculum. Through analysis of unit-based tasks, the faculty is assured of its alignment to the standards. Grade teams also create Common Core performance-based assessments in math. An example of this is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math task that required students to analyze and determine the accuracy of sample solutions to a Common Core-aligned math problem. Students were tasked to demonstrate an understanding of geometric transformations such as translation and reflection as they determined how a shape was transposed on a grid. This task was also written in Spanish for ELLs.
- ELLs are grouped for instruction in literacy based upon their level of proficiency. Across the grades, teachers use Code X with appropriate scaffolds for the intermediate and advanced groups. Teachers use National Geographic Kids magazine, with embedded weekly assessments and a modified gradient of text complexity for newly arrived ELLs and other students who are assessed to have beginning language acquisition skills. The school also uses the Glencoe Science curriculum. The principal maintains that science instruction is grounded in the implementation of the New York State Core Curriculum for Intermediate Science in conjunction with the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, comprehensive lab reports documenting scientific inquiry and investigations are an integral component of the science curriculum.
- The social studies curriculum was developed by the school in alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and the New York City Social Studies Scope and Sequence. The curriculum is designed around analyzing historical texts and composing argumentative essays. Primary and secondary source documents provide evidentiary resources. Common Core literacy standards are integrated within each unit.
- Within each unit of study of the English language arts (ELA) and math curricula, teacher teams have granulated the Common Core Learning Standards into learning objectives that target specific skills, as reflected in the "Granulated Curriculum Map" of each unit. The learning objectives are directly aligned with the college and career readiness skills in reading and math such as College and Career Anchor Standard R.8 about delineating and evaluating the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance of the evidence.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently expect and hold teachers accountable to high levels of professionalism, instruction and communication and assume accountability for providing effective training to support teachers in meeting these expectations. In turn, teachers establish a culture of high expectations for students and provide effective instruction, feedback and supports.

### Impact

The established culture of high expectations supports teaching and learning school wide and ensures that all students are prepared for academic progress and ownership of learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have attended summer institutes focusing on the Explicit Teaching Model, which comprises a gradual release of responsibility from explicit teaching or modeling to guided practice to independent work. Teachers are required to use this instructional paradigm throughout all subject areas. School leaders use the Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Support Centers (RSE-TASC) walkthrough protocol to monitor school-wide implementation of this model.
- Math and ELA assistant principals email “Weekly Flow” memos to teachers in their respective areas of supervision. For example, the assistant principal of mathematics issued a comprehensive “Mathematics Flow of the Week” memo in which he reminded 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers of the imminent math portfolio task submission deadline and highlighted learning targets for Common Core 6NS.C5 – “recognizing opposite signs of numbers” and provided resources for 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. In addition, teachers are provided with a school-wide “Daily Flow” every morning.
- The school uses the Engrade academic management system. Students and parents have access to student data and assignments that are posted on Engrade by every teacher. Based on the data in Engrade, students may sign up for skills clinics in under-performing areas.
- Posted in each classroom is a chart that reminds students of the strategies that they are required to use before seeking the teacher’s assistance in completing assigned tasks. They are: “review your notes and reference materials, consult the strategy wall, confer with a group member, and use on-line resources such as Kahn Academy Skills Tutor.” This does not preclude teachers strategically circulating throughout classrooms to monitor and provide support for students during the independent work component of each lesson.
- Across classrooms, teachers systematically employ several strategies to promote student self-management of learning such as peer assessment and feedback, reflection journals and mixed-ability partnerships.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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**Findings**

Teacher teams collaborate effectively to analyze assessment data, student work and examine key elements of teacher practice. There is a culture of distributed leadership throughout the school.

**Impact**

Inquiry-based teacher team collaborations and distributed leadership improve pedagogy, student performance and teacher leadership. Distributive leadership practices also engage teachers as key instructional decision makers in school-wide policies and practices.

**Supporting Evidence**

- During a vertical math teacher team meeting, teachers were observed seated at grade level tables. Each table was led by the math demonstration teacher for the grade and the assistant principal of math served as the room facilitator. Within each group, teachers analyzed student work samples of recent performance-based assessments to focus on their respective inquiry points. One group discussed misconceptions regarding language as opposed to misconceptions regarding the math and how to scaffold math vocabulary for the school’s predominant ELLs population. Another group also focused on language, as teachers analyzed terms on the performance-based assessment that appeared to confuse students. The third group shared scaffolds for supporting students with the division of mixed numbers. Teacher teams also looked at school wide math data to analyze prevalent trends.
- Teacher teams post lesson plans on the wall of the teacher team meeting room for sharing and peer feedback. Several posted lesson plans were observed on the day of the visit.
- Through participation in the Teacher Incentive Fund grant-funded initiative, school leaders have designated select teachers as Peer Instructional Coaches and Demonstration Teachers. Peer Instructional Coaches facilitate teacher inter-visitations, lead Common Core study groups and lead teacher teams in data analysis and curriculum modification. Demonstration teachers open their classrooms for lab-site demonstrations and share Common Core-aligned instructional resources.
- The principal shares that over the years, the long-standing vertical action research team has devised a variety of strategies based on the cycle of identification, research, analysis and problem solving. The team is focused on how to reach reluctant and at-risk students. In response, a series of “town hall sessions” have been established in conjunction with lunch period tutorial sessions.