

**NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
Office of Accountability**

**Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)**

**SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT**

<b>DBN:</b>	03M256
<b>District Name:</b>	District 3
<b>School Name:</b>	MS 256 Academic and Athletic Excellence
<b>School Address:</b>	154 West 93 <sup>rd</sup> Street, NY 10025
<b>Principal:</b>	Jeffrey Perl
<b>Accountability Phase/Category:</b>	Improvement (year-1) - Comprehensive
<b>Areas of Identification:</b>	English Language Arts - All Students; African American Students; Hispanic Students; Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students
<b>Dates of On-site Review:</b>	May 8-9, 2012

**PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT**

“MS 256 – Academic and Athletic Excellence is a small learning community that promotes a spirit of creativity, innovation and success. Employing an early high school model, we foster positive relationships between teachers, students, parents and community members. Incorporating the philosophy of PREP (be Prepared, be Respectful, meet Expectations, be Positive) in conjunction with a comprehensive, rigorous curriculum and differentiated instruction, we address each student as a whole person, meeting his or her academic, physical, and personal-social needs. MS 256 provides a safe environment for motivated, educated, life-long learners who, upon graduation, are academically and socially prepared to succeed in the high schools they choose to attend.”

**PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS**

- The school has made significant improvements in the area of safety, and students and parents indicate that they feel supported and welcomed.
- The school has established unique external partnerships with Creative Connections, which supports student activities in afterschool programs, and with the New York Historical Society, which provides modeling for teachers of social studies and curricular resources for the humanities program.
- Students indicated that they like being at the school and appreciate that teachers are available to help them whenever they need academic support.

## **PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA**

#### **FINDINGS:**

- There is limited evidence that the multiple sources of data that are collected are used to inform teachers as they plan and monitor group or individual instruction, reducing their ability to meet the needs of students in English language arts (ELA).
- There are professional learning communities (PLCs) in each grade. The sixth grade is the only grade with a designated Inquiry Team in place, and the team has developed a portfolio of proven best practices. However, there is little evidence that the PLCs meet and collaborate to share the best practices and successful strategies developed within their teams. Conversations, procedures and protocols within PLCs are inconsistent, resulting in missed opportunities to support student learning and the development of teacher skills.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- School leaders should offer comprehensive professional development (PD) on analyzing and using data to inform and modify instruction. School leaders should work with teachers to develop a system for the collection, analysis, and strategic use of data that is communicated and adhered to by all teachers to provide differentiated instruction in ELA.
- School leaders should collaborate with Inquiry Team leaders to examine existing procedures for supporting and following up on individual students at each grade level determine if there is consistency among grade levels, and address ways to ensure that a consistent protocol is followed throughout the school.

### **II. TEACHING AND LEARNING**

#### **FINDINGS:**

- Although differentiation has been stated by school leaders as a schoolwide instructional goal, there is limited evidence of differentiated instruction and a lack of clarity among teachers as to how to infuse differentiated strategies into their daily lessons. Therefore, the individual needs of all learners are not consistently being met.
- School leaders note that reading and writing is the focus for improvement in ELA. Classroom observations conducted by the review team indicated, however, limited evidence that most ELA classes have a literacy-rich environment with organized, leveled classroom libraries. This minimizes opportunities for students to read daily fiction and non-fiction material at their instructional levels.
- Based on observations and review of student work, the review team saw limited evidence in the writing entries in notebooks, portfolios, and on display that student tasks are appropriately challenging. Most student work samples reviewed were not aligned to current NYS grade level standards. Additionally, there is limited evidence of student growth in stamina, style, voice, and vocabulary usage. The examination of student writing pieces over the course of time, from September to the time of the review, did not demonstrate growth or an increase in the length or sophistication of the piece to show that students were

writing more complex pieces or were moving to the next level of writing. This results in a lack of scaffolding to move students to the next level.

- In classes visited by the review team, a didactic or direct instruction approach was used by most teachers. In-class assignments and question/answer interactions with students did not consistently encourage higher order thinking. As a result, there were limited opportunities for students to participate in rigorous learning, such as group discussions using accountable talk or hands-on activities.
- The effective use of rubrics to guide students' production and assessment of their own work and challenge them to higher levels of performance is inconsistent across content and grade levels. Therefore, students do not benefit from specific and concise feedback that would indicate what they needed to improve their work and advance to the next level.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- School leaders, in collaboration with teachers, should identify clear indicators of the elements of differentiated instruction and through self and peer assessment, determine the extent to which these elements are present in daily lesson plans and instruction. Based on these assessments, school leaders should identify areas in which PD is needed, as well as topics to address in grade-level and department team meetings.
- School leaders, in collaboration with ELA and other content area teachers, should assess, level, and organize available fiction and non-fiction books for distribution to the classroom. The books should be displayed and used regularly to support literacy development in ELA and content classrooms. These classroom libraries should be regularly updated, with additional materials, as needed, based on student reading and interest levels, as well as units of instruction.
- School leaders and teachers should revisit the criteria for student writing in ELA and across all content areas to ensure that teachers plan appropriately challenging writing tasks for students. School leaders and teachers should monitor student writing to ensure it is scaffolded, with evidence that writing skills improve over time, including, but not limited to, style, voice, and vocabulary usage.
- School leaders, in collaboration with teacher teams, should analyze the extent to which accountable talk and higher order thinking are evident in the classroom and identify ways to increase use and support implementation through PD. School leaders should monitor the incorporation of higher order thinking skills through the observation process.
- School leaders and teachers should analyze the quality and frequency of teacher feedback on student work and ensure that it is clearly understood by students to move them to the next level. School leaders, in collaboration with teachers, should examine the extent to which existing rubrics provide specific, quality feedback to help students improve. School leaders should use authentic student work to norm both expectations for and the quality of feedback when evaluating student work.

### III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

#### FINDINGS:

- Based on interviews, the review team ascertained that “quick visits,” or informal walkthroughs, are frequently conducted by school leaders. However, teachers report the benefit from these short observations is limited because the checklist format provides little information to improve their practice, resulting in limited impact on instruction.
- Although formal evaluations are conducted that include pre and post observation conferences, there is limited evidence that school leaders frequently follow-up with teachers beyond the post-observation conference. As a result, expectations that teachers implement strategies and recommendations that were discussed in the post-observation conference are inconsistently monitored and contribute to the gradual pace of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Although school leaders recognize the need for PD to support teaching and learning, there is limited evidence of a comprehensive, focused, year-long, schoolwide PD plan based on the analysis of quantitative or qualitative data. The lack of a focused plan limits the ability of school leaders and faculty to identify, prioritize, and strategically address pedagogical practices to improve teaching and learning.
- There are several teachers who have split programs. Of the fifteen teachers on staff, almost half have programs that incorporate mixed subject area foci and/or administrative responsibilities. A review of program cards for these teachers indicated gaps in their schedule that have some teachers teaching two or three periods on a given day. This results in an inefficient use of instructional time to support ELA instruction for students.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leaders, in collaboration with teachers, should discuss how the “quick visits” can more effectively support instruction and determine how to use the process to better meet the needs of teachers and students. School leaders should consider including actionable next steps for teachers within the “quick visits” protocol. This practice should enable teachers to immediately improve their pedagogical practices, and the degree of implementation of these action steps should form the basis of the subsequent formal observation.
- School leaders should develop a schedule of formal observations that include pre/post meeting times and follow-up times to ensure recommendations are being implemented. Recommendations from formal observations should be incorporated as a component of the informal walkthrough to ensure consistency.
- School leaders, in collaboration with teachers, should develop a year-long, PD plan to improve teaching and learning that is shared with the staff and is known to all stakeholders. This strategic plan should guide PD offerings both on- and offsite and should focus on areas of improvement that are aligned with schoolwide goals based on data. School leaders should consider limiting new initiatives until the existing ones are in place.
- School leaders should re-examine the existing school schedule to maximize use of personnel. School leaders should consider limiting split programs to enable teachers to develop their instructional practices in the subject area(s) for which they are certified. School leaders should ensure that teachers’ programs

cards are reflective of their daily schedule and periods designated to administrative tasks are clearly noted. The reduction in split programs should allow for some teachers to provide additional instructional time for at-risk students in ELA. This practice will allow school leaders to evaluate the impact of services provided.

#### **IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

##### **FINDINGS:**

- The school has a parent coordinator and a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). School leaders and parents indicate that parents are supportive of the school and its staff; however, there is limited parent involvement, and the number of parents who participate in school activities is low. This results in limited parental participation and a lack of connection between home and school.
- Although guidance services are offered, there is limited support for the transition from middle to high school or support for social/emotional counseling.

##### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- School leaders should work with the PTA and the parent coordinator to develop an action plan to involve more parents in school events and in activities that positively impact their child's education. This plan may include increasing parent access to teachers at the beginning of the year during a "curriculum night" format. This would provide parents with an opportunity to be better informed about expectations and instructional goals for their child at school. The parent coordinator should consider providing parent workshops for topics that can include the application process to high school, the use of ARIS Parent Link, and methods to improve study habits. These workshops can be given offsite and at alternative times, such as before or after the school day, to increase the opportunity for parents to attend.
- School leaders should identify what guidance services are needed to optimally support students. School leaders should assess the extent to which pupil personnel services are provided to students beyond their mandated requirements and outline a plan to address topics such as high school articulation and social/emotional counseling services for at-risk students.

#### **V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

##### **FINDINGS:**

- There is evidence that school leaders work collaboratively with teachers to identify three written personal PD goals for the year. However, there is limited evidence that either teachers or school leaders revisit these goals on a regular basis or reflect upon the extent to which these goals influence practice.
- School leaders identify differentiation as a key focus of PD to meet the needs of a diverse student population in specific subgroups. However, in classes observed by the review team, there was limited evidence that strategies for differentiation learned in the provided PD are embedded in teachers' instructional practice.
- Although the English language learner (ELL) and students with disabilities populations have increased, there is limited evidence of ongoing PD to support the diverse needs of these groups. Without dedicated

PD designed to support these learners, strategies available to teachers to meet these students' specific instructional needs are limited.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- School leaders, in collaboration with teachers, should develop a timeline for a mid-year and end-of-year reflection for personal PD goals. The purpose of this reflection is to evaluate the extent to which the goal is being met and applied in the classroom. The goals should be incorporated into both the formal and informal observation structure. Teachers should be provided with feedback as to their progress in achieving their professional goal.
- School leaders, in collaboration with teachers, should provide PD on differentiated instruction to all teachers. School leaders should ensure the integration of differentiation strategies through formal and informal observations. School leaders should use and build upon the internal expertise of teachers who have been observed using effective differentiation strategies. School leaders should arrange for inter-visitiation and peer observations within these classes.
- The school leaders should provide PD to teachers to enable them to develop skills and strategies to meet the academic and social/emotional needs of ELLs and students with disabilities. Implementation of these skills should be monitored through both formal and informal observations by school leaders and peers.

**VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

**FINDINGS:**

- Observations and interviews conducted by the review team indicate limited availability and use of technology in the classroom, resulting in teachers and students not having access to, or use of, technology to support learning.
- The school library is being used as a classroom. Interviews with multiple constituencies, supported by the review team's observations, indicate that this space is used primarily as a multi-purpose room for classes and, at times, as a computer lab, resulting in teachers and students being unable to use the library as an academic resource. Books and materials are located on shelves, but were not organized for ease of access to support independent student research.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- School leaders should inventory existing technology and create a technology plan for upgrading and supplementing existing technology resources, including SMART Boards, LCD projectors, and document cameras. In addition, a needs assessment to determine the comfort level and aptitude of teachers in using technology should be conducted to inform the design and implement PD to support the infusion of technology within lessons.
- School leaders should seek the support of the Network to work with the other campus school leaders to develop a plan for library usage. School leaders, in collaboration with the Network, should analyze space, determine if a library is viable given space restraints, and if not viable, distribute books in an organized way to supplement classroom libraries for student use.

#### **PART 4: CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

The findings and recommendations noted in the report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning, and the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) for school year 2012-13. The school should also continue its efforts in the implementation of the following Regents Reform Agenda initiatives: P-12 Common Core Learning Standards, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.