



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Author's Academy

Elementary School X063

**1260 Franklin Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Reinaldo Diaz-Lens

**Date of review: February 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Luz T. Cortazzo**

The School Context

PS 63 is an Elementary school with 588 students from grade kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 37% Black, 60% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92%.

School Quality Criteria

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

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Distributed leadership structures are embedded in the school's culture and structure so that teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on vertical and horizontal teams, and consistently analyze assessment data and student work so that units are adjusted to meet students' needs.

Impact

The structured professional collaborations result in shared improvements in teacher practice; increased levels of student achievement. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams have a facilitator, timekeeper and recorder to support the work within teams. There are opportunities for all teachers to play a leadership role around the inquiry work. Facilitators rotate on a monthly basis and work collaboratively with the team to plan agenda items and collect student work samples.
- Teacher teams establish clear next steps based on patterns observed in student work samples or set individualized plans based on student's specific needs. For example, during a second grade math team meeting, teachers unpacked a math unit and the performance task demands for the unit. They discussed what students needed to know to complete the task as well as students' strengths and struggles. As a result, teachers agreed that in subsequent lessons they needed to infuse strategies to help students apply the commutative property of addition and subtraction to support student learning.
- Teachers meet on a weekly basis and extend their work during professional development time on Mondays to engage in inquiry work. The inquiry focus this year is looking at student work as well as questioning and discussion. Teacher facilitators support the teams in analyzing student work to surface skill deficits that students demonstrate and assess their progress towards reaching proficiency every three weeks with diagnostic benchmarks.
- The school's ability to exceed the target in the Student Progress, School Achievement and Closing the Achievement Gap section of the School Quality Guide is attributed greatly to the efforts of teacher teams and their work in identifying target populations for interventions, and developing Common Core aligned curricula and assessment in ELA and math as evidenced by a review of past agendas.
- Facilitators meet on a monthly basis with the administrative team to discuss school-wide patterns and trends as well as set areas of focus for each grade based on trends found.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Although instruction, anchored in common beliefs, provides consistent instructional support, including scaffolds and questioning, the use of strategic extensions that foster higher order thinking demonstrated in rigorous student work and discussions varies across classrooms.

Impact

Although, across classrooms, multiple access points support student engagement in rigorous tasks, supports and extensions are not always strategically planned, so that all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and Students with Disabilities (SWDs), have opportunities to be highly engaged and to demonstrate critical and analytical thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- During visits to classrooms lessons were organized according to the workshop model with clear teaching points and mini-lessons that connect learning to previous concepts and engage students in active involvement, and turn-and-talk is frequently utilized in addition to independent activities and teacher modeling.
- Across the school, differentiation was noted in various forms including scaffolds such as word banks, tiered vocabulary, graphic organizers, pictures, sentence starters, and different leveled and anchor texts for close reading. However, in some classrooms, lessons did not provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions for all learners to produce student work reflective of the expectations and rigor of the curricula. In some cases, differentiation cited in lesson plans did not target ELLs or SDWs specifically. For example, in a math lesson plan, the differentiation cited read, “low group will receive extra guided practice and guidance; medium and high groups will get leveled independent work.”
- In one English Language Arts class, (ELA), students had structured opportunities to engage in tasks on their own or with their peers to build critical thinking skills through an intense focus on reading comprehension, extended writing using evidence from the text, and turn and talk strategies. In another ELA class, however, tasks were still heavily scaffolded and teacher directed, hindering student independence and ownership.
- In a 3rd grade math class, students were learning to solve the area of regular and irregular shapes, by applying the formula length x width. The teacher modeled steps needed to solve the problem and the task was appropriate for the middle group students. However, there were several low level students who needed more support, and some higher group students who were ready to tackle a more challenging task, yet the work provided did not cognitively challenge them. Consequently, the class did not sufficiently engage students in higher order thinking so that all work products and activities were appropriately cognitively demanding of all learners, especially ELLs and those performing at the highest achievement level.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and strategically integrate the instructional shifts, backward design principles, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to make the learning accessible and engaging for all students. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are embedded coherently across all grades.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions have resulted in coherence across grades and subjects areas in promoting college readiness for all learners. Academic tasks across grades and subjects ensure all learners must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school use of ReadyGen, the research-based Fountas and Pinnell Reading Assessment, and the math curriculum map provide exposure to rigorous tasks and learning materials. Additionally, the school strategically incorporates the instructional shifts across grades by requiring students to cite evidence from texts, and in the use of a balance of informational and literary texts in English language arts. Higher order thinking was evident in the grade 5 writing unit which had questions such as, "What do we think we know about courage?" and "How are acts of courage revealed?"
- The reading, writing and math units of study are aligned with the CCLS instructional shifts. Successful strategies include teachers constantly building the vocabulary students need to access grade-level complex text, text-based responses, use of a matrix to uncover gaps in learning, and problem solving through reading and writing.
- Teachers ensure that learners are able to access curriculum through thoughtful collaborative planning based on a thorough review of student work and data, as evidenced during the grade 2 math team meeting. School leaders and Lead teachers in English language arts and math support teacher work to unpack observations of student work and assessments. Through item analysis, staff determines student performance and then plans purposefully in order to meet the needs of all students.
- In math, the shifts of focusing on fluency, providing deep understanding of concepts, developing speed and accuracy, and applying learning to real world problems were explicit in curricula artifacts. This was evidenced in the grade 3 pacing calendar for the unit on Area and Multiplication that also connected to number and operations, developing fluency with addition and subtraction, multiplication and division thus promoting depth in planning.
- Partnerships with Time In for Kids allow students in Pre-K-3 to engage in a full range of conceptual, intellectual and creative expression in music, visual arts, literature and film. Students engage in multiple experiences of writing from visual sources as stated in the CCLS.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms teachers use rubrics aligned to the school's curricula to provide feedback; however, the levels of actionable feedback to students varied across some grades. Classroom teacher assessment practices reflect the use of on-going checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

The use of rubrics and clear grading policies aligned to the curricula provide feedback to students and teachers regarding student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- During the student meeting, it was found that across subjects feedback to students varied within class work folders from rubrics that were only circled or checked to rubrics that provided more meaningful feedback that included a next step for students.
- Teachers utilize a variety of assessments to monitor student progress in all content areas. For example, teachers utilize pre-, mid- and post- unit assessments within reading, writing and mathematics units of study. Based upon findings teachers make modifications to the units to meet the needs of individual students as well as groups of students.
- In classrooms visited, students were observed using rubrics to self and peer assess, and used rubrics to track their progress.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school has established a culture for learning by consistently communicating a unified set of high academic expectations for both teachers and students through the implementation of the Danielson Framework and the instructional shifts.

Impact

Accountability and mutual collaboration are structures that support the school's high expectations for families, staff and students to ensure that students, including high-needs subgroups, own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shares his expectations with the staff during one-on one meetings, faculty conferences and professional development meetings. School leaders expressed the expectation that teachers understand each student's entry point in order to support student's continued growth.
- Teacher teams have set high level expectations for student feedback, within all subgroups, and have created checklists, daily learning targets, student friendly rubrics and student reflection sheets to hold students accountable for review of their work and to communicate specific next steps.
- Ongoing feedback to families is provided in monthly newsletters, progress reports to parents three times per year, report cards, phone calls, professional learning calendars and parent workshops creating academic discourse that reinforces the strong culture for learning that resonates throughout the school.
- In the student meeting, higher-grade students spoke explicitly about teachers preparing them for the middle school application, middle level work, and gaining acceptance into competitive middle schools such as Mott Hall.