Quality Review Report

2015-2016

J.H.S. 050 John D. Wells

Junior High School K050

183 South 3rd Street
Brooklyn
NY 11211

Principal: Benjamin Honoroff

Date of review: March 1, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

The School Context

J.H.S. 050 John D. Wells is a junior high school with 200 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 14% Black, 83% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 21% English Language Learners and 33% students with disabilities. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 88.7%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	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**	**Proficient**
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**	**Developing**
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		
To what extent does the school…	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**	**Proficient**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	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**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Weekly teacher team meetings allow all teachers across the school to engage in collaborative planning, data analysis and decision making linked to schoolwide goals and initiatives.

Impact

Teacher team investigations of strengths and needs in student work and data, along with teacher voice in school level decisions, contribute to improvement of teacher practice and student progress towards learning goals.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers meet regularly and engage in the collection, disaggregation and analysis of data from assessments such as standardized assessments, on-demand performance tasks, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments, chapter tests and end-of-unit assessments. Through cycles of inquiry that last up to eight weeks, teams examine classroom practice and review assessment data and student work, focusing on topics such as language acquisition skills and strategies and protocols for cultivating student discourse through Evidenced-based Argumentation (EBA), the school's instructional focus. Meetings also focus on refining and revising curricula. For example, units of science curriculum were revised to add more inquiry-based tasks and teachers revised literacy curricula to integrate writing units from *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP)* curriculum with content from the *Expeditionary Learning* curriculum.

- Observation of a teacher team meeting showed teacher use of a "Strengths and Gaps" protocol and a rubric to guide participants in analyzing samples of math and English Language Arts (ELA) student work, to pinpoint strengths and gaps across work samples with the same or different mastery levels. For the ELA samples, teachers concluded that while students were generally able to create strong claims and provide explanations, some claims reflected opinions rather than text-based evidence. In math, one strength was that most of the students showed mastery of problems involving proportions. A gap was identified as student weakness in cross-multiplying in problems involving division. Teachers reported that similar conversations about student strengths and needs are facilitated by a "kid talk" protocol that all teams use during meetings.

- There are varied opportunities for teacher input in school level decision making, with peers serving in roles such as grade leaders, dean, guidance counselor, instructional coach, model teachers and peer collaborative teacher. Teacher leaders are also members of the leadership cabinet, teacher consultation committee, articulation committee, and the Children Are Reason Enough (CARE), School Implementation Team (SIT), Parent Teacher Home Visit (PTHV) and / or Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT). Through these roles, teacher leaders implement professional development surveys, collaborate with the school leader at a weekly meeting and communicate feedback from all staff to inform schoolwide decisions and activities. They lead all staff in cross-disciplinary collaborations to plan lessons and units, analyze student work and data, monitor student progress and implement strategies for schoolwide improvement in teaching and learning.

Area of Focus			

Quality Indicator:	**1.2 Pedagogy**	**Rating:**	**Developing**

Findings

While there are student-to-student discussions in some classrooms, lessons do not consistently facilitate discussions with all students demonstrating high levels of thinking. Teaching practices do not allow all students to consistently engage in a productive struggle with challenging tasks.

Impact

There are limited opportunities for students to participate actively in high level peer-to-peer discussions and complete tasks that consistently demonstrate higher order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- In most classrooms visited, teachers provided visual supports and scaffolds for students to be highly engaged in learning. In an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, the teacher used a projector to display and highlight portions of a selection to illustrate evidence about working conditions. Then the teacher distributed sentence strips with examples of evidence for students to sort, based on their reading of a handout with a passage about "The Mill Girls" and a text about Lyddie, a character whom they were studying. In another class the teacher led students in analyzing causes and effects of events, by showing them a political cartoon linked to the Boston Massacre, using historical documents to show slices of events during that historical period, giving them sentence strips to place events in chronological order, and providing texts for them to read for more information about the American Revolution.

- In alignment to the school's instructional focus on EBA, students in a class visited were immersed in peer-to-peer questioning and discussion as they engaged in close reading of a selection about child labor. Using an excerpt from the text, *Iqbal Masih*, *Crusader for Children*, they worked with peers in small groups to answer focus questions, by creating claims and supporting their positions with evidence about the lives of children working in factories in Pakistan. Students in another class engaged in similar activities, based on a discussion question assigned to their group, in their reading of a selection about difficulties that Malala, an activist, faced and overcame. They used a claim proof, explanation, and conclusion (CPEC) checklist to develop and share arguments about the injustices of Malala's life. The high level of peer-to-peer discussion evidenced in these two classes was not noted in other classrooms. Further, the practice of inviting students to comment on responses given by their peers was not routinely invoked in classrooms where discussions mostly consisted of a teacher-student question and answer session.

- Student engagement in challenging work was evident in some classrooms, including one where, with differentiated levels of support from several adults, students with disabilities, worked on differentiated problems involving integers and the number line. One student solved problems using the *IXL* online assessment platform, a few others used whiteboards to practice problem solving steps and another group solved problems in a math textbook. In another class, groups of English as a New Language (ENL) students worked with peers, reading an excerpt about "The Family of Little Feet", from *The House on Mango Street*, in both English and Spanish, to determine the main idea and author's purpose. In a few other classrooms, tasks were less demanding, with students reading short excerpts of texts and the teacher calling on volunteers to answer a few low-level questions. For example, students in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class spent most of the observed period examining a slide of a cell on a microscope and drawing a diagram of what they had seen.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Using student work and data, teachers continue to refine units of study to deepen alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.

Impact

All learners have access to engaging Common Core-aligned curricula, with tasks designed to accelerate their progress towards college and career readiness goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum guides and maps for each content area show detailed Common Core-aligned units and tasks, derived from revisions of past units, modification of lessons from *EngageNY*, and the adoption of new curriculum resources such as *Big Ideas* for math and *Expeditionary Learning* for ELA. New York State and city scope and sequence curricula supplement texts and other resources that provide content for instruction in social studies and science. The curriculum maps for all content areas illustrate features such as essential questions, embedded assessments and culminating tasks that reflect the instructional shifts. For example, a task for grade 6 students required them to analyze examples of figurative language in the text, *Bud, Not Buddy*, and follow up by selecting and explaining their own examples of figurative language.

- Based on a "Word Generation" initiative linked to the school's participation in the Middle School Quality Initiative, (MSQI) curriculum units show a focus on academic vocabulary across content and grades. Specific, targeted academic vocabulary words are threaded through units of interdisciplinary curricula that incorporate reading and debate activities that are supported by mentor texts and articles about current events. There are also units of instruction linked to an Extended Learning Time (ELT) program that offers all students access to courses in areas such as debate, spoken word, podcasting, video game design, robotics, and crocheting. An Integrated Arts Project (IAP) program adds content for theater, visual arts, and music activities and the IAP and ELT programs incorporate tasks that support the school's bilingual education program. Curriculum for an advisory program rounds out curricula offerings aligned to college and career readiness goals for all students.

- In collaboration with a Community School Director, MSQI coach and a professional development consultant from Teaching Matters, the school leader and grade leaders, facilitate planning sessions that focus on all teachers using student work and data to identify types of supports needed for ENL students and students with disabilities. Unit maps and lesson plans illustrate incorporation of tiered vocabulary, sentence starters, discussion prompts and tasks that incorporate use of dictionaries and glossaries as supports for ENL students. Students also have access to technology-based curriculum support programs such as *LightSail,* an I-Pad based reading program, Wilson's phonics-based *Just Words* program and *IXL,* which offers skill building activities across content areas.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Assessment practices reflect ongoing checks for understanding and generate data used to monitor student progress and inform adjustments to curriculum and instruction to meet student needs.

Impact
Teachers have information with which to adjust instructional practices so that student needs are identified and addressed effectively.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams reported that, using resources from *a* Data Driven Classroom (DDC) tool, all teachers administer common benchmark and culminating assessments, aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and shifts. Using tools such as a "Strengths and Gaps" T-chart, teachers examine item analysis data from these and other assessments to measure student progress and determine next steps for improving student performance. Documents such as weekly checkpoint logs and error analysis reports seen in assessment binders, illustrate close monitoring of individual student, class, grade and school level progress across assessments. Teacher team meeting records also show ongoing analysis of assessment data and teacher use of re-teach planning grids that outline adjustments aimed at improving student mastery of targeted skills and content. Adjustments include grouping and re-grouping of students and use of online resources for skills practice, as applicable to learning needs detected.

- The principal used spreadsheets to demonstrate how staff members disaggregate assessment data to monitor the performance of individual students, as well as subgroups of students. Color-coded spreadsheets with item skills data show student growth in areas such as independent reading levels, as measured by two iterations of DRP assessments, and class data sheets reflect monitoring of student progress on unit assessments in math and science. Further, teacher conference logs and reflections on assessment data indicate that all teachers regularly examine results of assessments and identify areas for enrichment and intervention. Interventions include placing students in a Reading is Transformational (RIT) class and programming some students for the *Just Words* Wilson reading intervention program, based on DRP data. Enrichment includes placement of some students in an RIT class that immerses them in debate activities.

- As observed in classrooms, students self-assess and are able to talk about their progress, using checklists and rubrics. One student explained how rubrics and checklists help students to determine what to include in their work. In reflecting on performance on an essay, another student noted, "I include quotes and details in my essays about our books but now I am working on making connections to my life when I write about a character". Student portfolios with student-teacher conference notes, student goals for each quarter, and reflections on progress towards goals, indicate that students monitor their own growth in performance across core disciplines. Teachers also implement ongoing assessments via exit tickets and use whole class questioning, as well as individual and small group conferencing, to check for understanding. In some classrooms, teachers followed up on their findings immediately, as was seen in a class, where, after checking in on groups at work, the teacher paused the lesson to point out that instead of writing that the character was challenged, students needed to "be more specific and elaborate by giving details and examples of the challenges".

Quality Indicator:	**3.4 High Expectations**	**Rating:**	**Proficient**

Findings
Administrators effectively communicate high expectations to staff and families and support them in working with students to achieve all expectations.

Impact
Communication of high expectations to staff and families promotes student progress towards college and career readiness goals and results in a learning culture that continues to raise the bar for high quality teaching by all staff.

Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plan templates, weekly bulletins, curriculum maps, conference logs, data collection sheets, and templates for analyzing student work, are distributed to all staff to specify the school's high expectations for teaching and learning. To support teachers in meeting the expectations, the principal visits classrooms regularly and follows up with feedback, including next steps for the teacher to improve instruction in relation to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Additionally, through team discussions at grade, department and common planning meetings, teachers receive professional development support linked to their needs. Teacher leaders and consultants provide additional layers of personalized support to teachers, through e-mails, one-to-one conversations, model lesson demonstrations, peer intervisitations and video reviews of lessons. Using reviews of unit and lesson plans and analyses of student work and data, the principal holds staff accountable for expectations such as developing lesson plans with multiple entry points for all learners and insuring class discussions that require students to support their opinions with academic language across content areas and grades.

- Through texts, phone calls, orientation sessions, open houses, Tuesday outreach activities, workshops, staff conferences, and letters with information about class and homework expectations, the school supports families in understanding expectations for their children and how to help them achieve the high expectations set for and with them. As part of a Parent Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP), some teachers partner with a peer to visit families at home to communicate expectations for their children's success as learners. In addition, teachers who are members of an Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) initiative further communicate high expectations to and share feedback with families to help them understand expectations for the current and next grade and keep them abreast of their children's progress towards those expectations.

- Parents spoke highly of the many tools that the school uses to keep everyone "on the same page" about grades, conduct, attendance, and high school, and college plans. One parent observed that staff members host meetings on a variety of topics and added that she attended a meeting where school staff presented information about high school and college readiness requirements. Another reported that staff members provide training for families to learn how to use the *PupilPath* online data portal to view information about their children's progress and communicate with their children's teachers. Families also noted that staff members send home information in both Spanish and English and some facilitate classes that teach English Language to families of ENL students. According to the principal, these supports have contributed to ongoing improvement in student performance, as measured by data that shows student performance improving by an average of 5 DRP points schoolwide, between September 2015 and January 2016.