Quality Review Report

2015-2016

M.S. 302 Luisa Dessus Cruz

Middle School X302

681 Kelly Street
Bronx
NY 10455

Principal: Liza Ortiz

Date of review: December 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich

The School Context

M.S. 302 Luisa Dessus Cruz is a middle school with 502 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 20% Black, 78% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 25% English Language Learners and 27% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 87.2%.

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**	**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		
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	**Celebration**	**Well Developed**
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	**Additional Findings**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. School leaders and staff effectively communicate to students and parents expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

As a result, a culture of mutual accountability for the school's high expectations has school leaders and staff successfully partnering with families to support student progress toward identified expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Administration and staff have developed school wide expectations for writing arguments so students know they must have supporting evidence or logical reasoning for claims and the use of annotation. Administration communicates these high expectations through many venues including staff handbook and memos. Attainment of high expectations is measured through the new summative performance assessment tasks and unit post-tests, whereby teachers provide feedback in students' portfolios. Students are provided a 'project week' to demonstrate their learning and meeting the success criteria of "I can" statements.

- Administration sets high expectations based on previous school wide data and use it as a basis for discussions with teachers prior to setting both teacher and student goals that are aligned to the school goals. To support teachers meeting these goals, a collaborative effort exists between the administration and staff, whereby using feedback from Peer Collaborative Teachers and individual conversations with teachers, informs the professional development plan tailored to meet teachers' needs. Teachers, especially the Peer Collaborative Teachers, create and deliver the professional development. To ensure implementation of these new learnings, administration consistently observes classes to specifically look for new techniques, provide actionable feedback, and review and comment on lessons. This feedback is evident in teacher observations, as noted in *Advance*.

- Parents stated they are highly pleased with the consistent communication with staff, which they believe ensures their children receive what they need to graduate. One parent stated and others agreed that they visit the online program, called Jupiter Grades, to check on their children's work status, to determine assignments to be done, and often use this information to email the teacher. Students agreed that they check Jupiter Grades at least weekly, while some stated they check daily. Students are permitted to revise work for a higher grade. Parents stated that teachers contact them through phone, emails, texts, messages via Jupiter Grades, or even backpack a notice, and the school's website, messenger, or phone blasts provides additional information. Parents stated they receive messages from the school whether their children are doing well or there is a concern. Students also have sent messages to teachers via Jupiter Grades, asking for clarification on an assignment. Parents were impressed by the teachers' level of communication, recalling teachers' responding to student emails for help on Sunday evenings. Parents stated that the school offers different workshops after school to assist them in helping their children complete *iReady*, homework, or reading logs. Parents stated that they are empowered to support their children's learning as a partner with the school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the school's articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

Impact
Across the vast majority of classes all students are not sufficiently required to make their thinking visible or engage in high levels of discussion leading to their ownership of learning**.**
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Supporting Evidence
- The school wide belief is that students learn best when "they are engaged in learning, the content is modeled explicitly, students are given opportunities to talk and think with their peers to deepen their understanding, there is teacher-scripted and on-the-spot questioning for assessing, and students are told exactly what they are going to learn through learning targets and success criteria." Further, there are school wide lesson structures for the use of a 60-minute workshop model and 24-minute stations. Although students have content that is modeled explicitly, opportunities for students to be engaged, to talk and think at high levels with their peers, and to express deep understandings of the content, were not observed across the vast majority of the school.

- In a grade 8 Humanities class, students worked in data-determined groups annotating tiered nonfiction readings, and then shared their self-generated text-based questions with their group and the whole class. In a grade 7 English Language Arts (ELA) class with English Language Learners (ELL), students with disabilities, and struggling students, groups were working with either a teacher, paraprofessional, or City Year member, a community based organization that trains teaching assistants. Some students worked alone to complete a graphic organizer relative to citing poem lines and explaining the meaning, moving on to a second poem when done. The instructional modifications, including translations, vocabulary support, or shorter text, support the school wide beliefs around students being engaged in learning. However, discussion was adult-led and occurred predominantly in groups, resulting in some learners not explaining their thinking.

- In two grade 8 ELA classes, students explored a new science fiction unit. In one class students used the "see, think, wonder" strategy as they viewed science fiction-themed pictures and shared ideas in groups before sharing with the whole class. In the other class, after a brief turn-and-talk about the Do Now, the teacher selected a student to call on a few others to share out responses. In a grade 6 math class, students stated the learning target, worked in groups, had choice to select problems, and bonus work. Students supported others and a student was asked to help another group. Yet, in a grade 6 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) ELA class the teachers conducted a 'think-aloud' as they demonstrated on the board an exemplar and non-exemplar of citing facts. In response to think-pair-share questions, a few group members responded to questions. Although all were engaged, not all students had the opportunity to demonstrate ownership of their work. Similarly, in a grade 8 math class students worked in groups answering tiered questions with all students engaged in creating high-level work products. However, pacing prevented some students from presenting their work, missing opportunities to demonstrate their thinking and ownership.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

The school creates and adapts cohesive curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards strategically integrates the instructional shifts, and reflects upon and refines curricula to address the needs of all learners and incorporate levels of rigor.

Impact

The school's commitment to planning and analyzing student work and revising units of study to increase coherency and to meet all student needs has resulted in an educational experience for students that is designed to provide access for them to think deeply and make connections among and between subjects, promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Common lesson structures for the use of a 60-minute workshop model and 24-minute stations are designed to be used schoolwide with Common Core-aligned materials and resources, tiered differentiation, Do Now, learning target, success criteria, possible pitfalls, guided questions, mini lesson, group work, independent practice, and closure. Lessons include success criteria or statements that upon completing the lesson students should be able to check the "I can" box. For example, in an ELA grade 8, "I can provide examples of the character's thoughts and feelings and infer what it reveals about their personality." A vast majority of lessons also include differentiation and assessment, however some with simple lists. Across the vast majority there are assessments, often with an exit ticket. Identification of discussion opportunities is evident. Teacher reflections on lessons are predominant.

- The staff uses Common Core-aligned materials *Code X* for ELA, *Glencoe Math, EngageNY, Scott Foresman Science,* and *Glencoe* for Social Studies. To support the goal of accelerating all learners in meeting their literacy goals, especially learners of English, students with disabilities, and struggling learners, students use *iZone* both in school and at home. With a large population ELLs, students with disabilities, and struggling learners, teachers plan instructional modifications and incorporate into the aforementioned Common Core-aligned materials. Teachers explained that with newcomers, "We plan for them to draft their thinking and explanations in their home language and then use Google translate, provide sentence stems, and encourage them to generate personal word banks."

- Teachers collaborate during a lesson-plan clinic to create curricula that are more coherent. Peer Instructional Coaches also provide teachers with actionable feedback based on student work and data. Teachers stated that this process has supported their pedagogical growth and they are seeing improvement in student learning. Teachers also support each other in modifying texts to support students learning English as a New Language, students with disabilities, and students who perform in the lowest third. For example, in grade 6, staff reviewed data and noticed a trend in students struggling with unit rate with decimals, and "so we revised and restructured lessons and the 'Boxed Oranges' task, on which many more students were successful". In a grade 8 social studies unit on the Reconstruction Era, the teacher modified the reading to support ELLs, students with disabilities, and Tier 1 and 2 learners. Further, staff reviewed student work and data, reflecting on the depth of students' responses, having since revised school wide efforts to promote asking questions, activating students' prior knowledge, and supporting students developing claims.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across the school, common assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula are utilized to identify student performance and progress toward goals.

Impact
The staff analyzes common assessments to provide a mutual lens and language to discuss student progress and inform instructional adjustments to advance student achievement, and teachers provide actionable feedback to students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and subjects, students keep their work in binder portfolios that include their proficiency levels, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) levels, goals, strategies, and supports provided to achieve scores for tasks, which list the Common Core Learning Standards and task description. These portfolios demonstrate student progress toward individual goals. Most students' portfolios include teacher conference dates and notes. Students also write reflections on their performance tasks and the strategies they used to solve these tasks. One performance task that involved research around colleges and universities included students' reflections and learning the difference between colleges and universities where the student used research materials and questioned the text and used annotation to complete the task and address skills that are the foci of the school.

- Students' English Language Arts journals include a table of contents of assignments, the learning targets, and 'do now' daily activities. In math journals, students complete a reflection journal, whereby they write their thought process for solving math problems, using metacognitive reflection process. Although students state they can revise work for a higher grade, students were unsure of when this can be done. Teachers stated that there is no rule for when students can revise their work, but it is at the students' discretion and time is provided in class, at lunch, or after school.

- Teachers have aligned assessments to the curricula and created or aligned rubrics and checklists to support student achievement. Students learn how to use rubrics to help determine completion and ratings, and rubrics and checklists support them in revising their work to "see what part you do and not do well and it depends on what level you get."

- Teachers provide students with feedback on their work and post it on bulletin boards, inside and outside the classrooms. The actionable feedback, rooted in the rubric language, is written on the rubric with ratings, and includes highlights and areas to improve. Teachers stated they want students to know they read the work and provide individualized feedback. Students can explain their next step for ensuing assignments according to the teacher's feedback. Student notebooks and folders show student work that includes, to a large degree, teacher responses in checkmarks, actionable feedback, and some with statements of encouragement.

- To determine student progress toward goals, teachers use common formative and summative assessments and the analysis of data. A consistent data cycle across the school includes teaching a lesson, analyzing student work for mastery and areas of need, reteaching, and regrouping, according to student need, and then reassessing. Teachers demonstrated the curricula revisions based on data and student work, the revising of student groups, and how and when they teach students with different approaches.

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

Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact
Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards, strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers who have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers are engaged in several teams including common planning, professional development, and instructional teams. There is also a consultation team and a Peer Collaborative Teacher team, thus empowering teachers to make decisions about instruction, professional development, and other issues. Teacher leaders facilitate the teacher team meetings with the support and collaboration of the team members. Teachers stated that sharing best practices has positively impacted their professional growth as they learn from each other. One teacher shared and others agreed that they share best practices as they plan. For example, teachers shared that the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher supports by "transcribing for ELL students and determining what works well for different language proficiency levels so we modify the text and graphics and collaborate to proof read and edit the material." Additionally, teachers explained that during common planning time they "revised *CodeX* units 1, 3, 4 and returned to unit 2 to build success criteria modeled our pacing guide to make sure that every teacher has the success criteria and learning target."

- In the instructional teams, teachers stated that their function is to collaboratively look at student work using the "wow, wonder, and trends" protocol. A teacher team demonstrated the next step in this protocol and determined when to reteach distributive property within their curriculum map. Teachers use Google docs to store their curriculum maps and input the standards and "I Can" statements according to their data-determined decisions. Teachers stated that this process has helped them grow as they support each other in implementing this protocol, as some teachers are new to the technology and others are new to teaching. When revising in Google docs, teachers note the changes in red font to signify the change for others intra- and inter-grade, or for administration.

- Teachers shared that they followed a protocol, which included conducting a teacher survey and analyzed the results from last year's observation data from *Advance* in order to determine additional professional development opportunities. The professional development calendar demonstrates sessions created and provided by teachers and Peer Instructional Coaches.

- Peer Instructional Coaches provide leadership in team meetings and during lesson plan clinics, during which they provide feedback to colleagues supporting lesson revisions. Teachers stated that this collegiality has supported their pedagogical growth and to that end they are seeing improvement in student learning. Teachers also support each other in modifying texts to support ELLs, students with disabilities, and students who perform in the lowest third.