Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Gravesend School

K-8 K095

345 Van Sicklen Street
Brooklyn
NY 11223

Principal: Janet A. Ndzibah

Date of review: February 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sheila S.- Gorski

The School Context

The Gravesend School is a K-8 school with 964 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 10% Black, 39% Hispanic, 24% White, and 26% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 19% 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 94.0%.

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	**Celebration**	**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**	**Well Developed**
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**	**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**	**Well Developed**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
The school ensures Common Core aligned curricula and strategically implements the instructional shifts. Refined curricula and academic tasks informed via student work and data provide access for a variety of learners.

Impact
The analysis of student work ensures that teachers design Common Core aligned units of study and academic tasks that meet the needs of diverse learners, thus promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) units of study and GoMath! are the school's chosen curricula for reading and math. Teachers have identified key standards for each unit of study and have created pre-assessments, post-assessments and tasks to measure the students' ability to show mastery of these standards. Teachers have also analyzed the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) matrix and use it to build rigor into the academic tasks. Teachers also incorporate the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) supports within units of study and daily lessons to afford students access into the curricula. Problem solving notebooks are integrated daily and math exemplars are integrated once a week in the math workshop to support math problem solving stories and conceptual understanding.

- A review of curriculum maps from kindergarten through grade 8 and across the subject areas depicts school-wide instructional coherence and ongoing alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, an eighth grade curriculum map on critical nonfiction includes Common Core reading and literature standards, key terms, anchor texts, materials/resources, and unit assessments. A built-in task and sample charts are highlighted, such as "citing evidence and creating a strong claim" to support student writing. Additionally, UDL modifications and cross curriculum ties are noted. Teachers incorporate "bends" in the units where the instruction takes a turn to attend to a critical point in the unit using essential questions and teaching points. They write pacing calendars in quarters, and in science, they indicate the objective, standard, labs and assessments at a glance. All curricular assessments include the format, a performance task or investigative projects. The investigative projects require that students explore a problem or concern stated by either the teacher or the student, and a summative assessment is used.

- A review of lesson plans reveals the workshop model represented in its components. A seventh grade lesson utilized a teaching point, an objective, and materials needed to execute the lesson. Additionally, the plan includes a connection, a teach, an active engagement, independent work, small group work and a share where students discuss their learning.

- Grade level teachers collaboratively analyze student work products and assessment data to refine lessons, meet the individual needs of students and ensure Common Core alignment. While reviewing units of study, thoughtful planning confirmed that the effective use of data ensures that students are reading on grade level, and are receiving effective reading strategies and techniques, such as guided reading and close reading of texts.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Pedagogy affords all students consistent instructional supports, including questions and discussion techniques. Across classrooms, student work and discussions reveal high levels of thinking.

Impact
Teachers implement a variety of strategies and scaffolds on a regular basis to encourage student engagement and produce meaningful work products, yet in some classes the level of discussions and participation varies, thus hindering a diversity of students from taking ownership for their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Across all classrooms, teachers consistently ensure resourceful learning environments that include station and center activities, classroom library collections, word walls and posted-labeled academic vocabulary words in the content areas. Additionally, there are identifiable meeting areas, SMART boards, projectors, easels, mentor texts, and charts depicting question prompts like, “What do you notice about the author’s use of punctuation?” A non-fiction text features chart asks, “What new information did you learn from the captions?” Parking lot charts memorialize questions to ensure discussion during the day.

- In a grade 7 science class students worked in groups using dipsticks to measure pH levels of liquids by comparing color changes to a pH scale to determine whether a liquid was an acid or a base. The teacher circulated the classroom checking in with students. Two of four students in a group were given the task to read a text related to the experiment while they waited their turn to engage in the hands-on activity. However, students were instead observing the work of their peers and were quiet, even with the teacher’s efforts to engage them after noting they were not. In a grade 7 English language arts (ELA) class student groups were working on author’s craft, identifying words that the author included to evoke emotions in the reader and create the mood. Student groups read several different articles about animals used for experiments, in education, and in animal testing. All students were engaged in reading or discussion, or using graphic organizers and a resource list of discipline-specific vocabulary. During a student group discussion a student commented, “There are more humane ways to handle animals, if you have to use them to help us without causing them pain!” While the topics discussed in most classrooms were at high interest levels and students worked cooperatively, teachers’ efforts to raise the level of student involvement and in-depth thinking in some of the observed classes were sometimes limited to questions and answers in groups or partnerships and student voices were not always heard in the discussions.

- During classroom visits, students consistently worked in groups or with a partner. Scaffolds included questions, graphic organizers, such as a post-it collection sheet, T-charts, and UDL supports. Yet, student-led discussions varied across classrooms. In a grade 3 class engaged in reading a mystery, the students learned about character by studying the character’s choices, and thinking about how they applied them to their lives. Students then stopped to jot their thoughts in their notebooks. The teacher then posed the question, “How can we connect that to our experiences?” Immediately the teacher called on a student to respond to the question, and moved on without affording students more time to share their thinking and participate in the discussion.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers monitor student progress via shared assessments. Varieties of checks for understanding culminate in effective adjustments and instructional decisions.

Impact
The use of common assessments and practices consistently create a clear picture of student progress toward goals and inform instructional changes, so that all learners exhibit increased mastery and are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers measure learning gaps, skills, and comprehension of standards taught. They administer TCRWP benchmark reading levels and marking period assessments five times a year. Teachers identify Common Core Learning Standards within each unit of study and design pre and post assessments to measure those standards. Analyses of pre-assessments identify student strengths and needs preceding each unit. Data results inform instructional adjustments noted on curriculum maps, and teachers use them to plan small group instruction. Progress reports are issued every marking period depicting academic growth, grade criteria across the content areas, and promotional status.

- On Demand writing assessments monitor writing progression with pre and post writing pieces to assess the understanding of multiple writing genres throughout the school year. Reading unit assessments include open-ended questions, based on the genre. For example, the task for a grade 8 study on the Progressive era required students to respond to, “How would you describe the successes and failure of the Progressive era?” In what sense were progressives successful of their own ideas?”

- Teachers use a grouping sheet, noting the writing unit of study, the topic, the standard, the strategy or skill, and the students of focus. For example, in kindergarten, during the January unit of study on “*How to Books: Writing to teach others”*, teachers group students based upon their need to understand how to use specific language, transitional words, and details. Likewise, GoMath! grouping sheets depict units of study, the standard of focus, the lesson topic and the skill addressed in each group. A grade 2 grouping sheet highlights the number and operations in base ten standard, adding two digit numbers. Students in this group practice how to break apart addends as tens and ones. A grade 2 technology/ social studies class gathering facts either about a rural, urban or suburban community were to create an exit project using software such as Keynote to make a slideshow, Image Blender 3 to create a blog, or PowerPoint to create a slideshow. A review of assessments indicates groupings and tailored adjustments are collected and effectively used on grouping sheets.

- Students use multiple forms of self-assessments, such as, rubrics and checklists. For example, in a social studies unit students use a rubric to examine standard progressions, support of textual evidence, conventions, and mechanics. They use a technique called “strategies to habits”. Students use a T-chart to self-assess strategies previously taught and record on one side, “I will remember to do this every time I’m writing independently!” On the other side they record, “I am always using these strategies! My strategy is now a habit.”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
Administration consistently messages the school's high expectations to staff in professional trainings and other means of communication. Families and the school successfully partner to support student progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact
Structures that sustain the school's high expectations encourage commitment and mutual accountability amongst all constituencies, and link a clear path toward increased progress to meet those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal ensures ongoing communication of the school's high expectation via planned daily cabinet meetings that emphasize a myriad of the administration's tasks. Some of those tasks focus on teacher observations and effective feedback, professional development, student assessments and school-wide data. An administrative weekly bulletin informs the staff of all school events. A "kudos" section of the bulletin cites a variety of important highlights, such as best teaching practices shared throughout classrooms or public recognition of someone's birthday. This mode of communication also reinforces policies, procedures and academic deadlines, creating a culture of mutual accountability.

- A monthly instructional coherence memo highlights the professional development focus for a given week, celebrates accomplishments, and reinforces the school's expectations. It also highlights instructional school-wide expectations and functions as a venue for ensuring school-wide coherence of these expectations. An example, in literacy, it provides a message to teachers on effective noticings, such as, "We have observed so many innovative examples of how teachers are utilizing technology to enhance the reader's and writer's workshop." It also provides a message of growth as a reminder of what is expected, such as ensuring that the reading block provides components of balanced literacy. These include word work, read aloud/grand conversations, shared reading/close reading, mini lesson, independent reading, guided reading, conferencing, and a share out. Similar feedback to the staff is provided for math, Danielson connections and samples of student writing. Teachers use reflection sheets and checklists to self-monitor instructional practices. Supervisors also use them when visiting classrooms to afford teachers meaningful feedback.

- From the onset, the school invites parents to be part of various workshops, such as a curriculum evening where they learn about the grade level units of study their children will engage in during the school year. Families learn about the grade level standards, benchmarks for running record levels, progress reports, and numerous websites that assist them in understanding their children's academic progress and partner with the school to support their children in meeting the schools high expectations.

- Parent workshops take place every Tuesday. Topics that strengthen the school-community relationship include Common Core Standards, instructional shifts, homework help, learning strategies and the use of technology. Additional supports include sessions on anti-bullying, stress and financial management, college and career readiness, and special education rights. Each grade shares a monthly newsletter with embedded supports for parents on the class focus, themes, curriculum, events and reminders. Face to face meetings, phone calls, and written correspondence also support means of ongoing communication.

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

Findings
The vast majority of teachers systematically analyze student data and classroom practices using the inquiry process. Professional collaborations strengthen instructional capacity and increase mastery of goals for groups of students.

Impact
Thoughtful analysis of student and teacher work and the implementation of the Common Core have resulted in school-wide instructional coherence and shared pedagogical improvements that have increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Team liaisons represent their peers and serve as a direct link between grade peers and the administration. Weekly meetings to discuss significant school initiatives in each area of study include the administration and the vast majority of teachers who comprise numerous teams. For example, the core inquiry team, instructional English language arts team, and the instructional math team meet with the administrative staff to analyze data, plan, examine student work, make instructional adjustments, inform professional development, and design or adjust curriculum maps. In addition, teachers hold lunch and learn gatherings to share their expertise or best practices with other teachers in the school.

- A grade 2 teacher team was observed engaged in an inquiry cycle that takes place for about six-weeks following the administration of a pre-assessment test or task prior to a unit of study. Teachers spoke of using the post-assessments to gauge student understanding of specific skills to be taught in the upcoming unit on implications for teaching moral and lesson. The team discussed student outcomes noted on a class assessment summary sheet depicting student performance in highlighted skills as a class. During the meeting, teachers examined trends of the students' ability to meet the unit expectations and determined lesson adjustments, such as pacing, small group instruction, and one-to-one conferences. Teachers also spoke of completing a sheet to design student groups of those with similar areas of need, including a variety of differentiated groups that are flexible and fluid and whose needs would be addressed throughout the unit of study. A post-assessment measures student mastery of the skill taught within a unit. Additional trends identify student progress, thereby informing further support for students who have not yet mastered certain skills. For the following week, the team's agenda was to focus on sharing their best practices and designing clear teaching points.

- Teams focus on the instructional goal of student engagement. A review of designed tasks indicates that teachers embed appropriate supports toward rigorous Common Core aligned work products for all learners. Teachers utilize the DOK matrix to design tasks and measure them within levels 3 and 4 of the matrix. Teams use progression charts, informed by the standards to create rubrics used for scoring tasks across classrooms. Teams thoughtfully plan access to rigorous, Common Core aligned tasks for all students, embedding UDL supports within units of study and daily lessons leading to entry points and access into curricula affording students opportunities to reach mastery of goals.