



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

John Ericsson

Middle School K126

**424 Leonard Street
Brooklyn
NY 11222**

Principal: Maria Ortega

**Date of review: March 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Maribel Hulla**

The School Context

John Ericsson MS126 is a middle school with 335 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 22% Black, 69% Hispanic, 6% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 36% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.0%.

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	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		
<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	Celebration	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations for teaching and learning to the entire school community and align them with the elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Parents receive regularly scheduled workshops and student achievement updates to assist in preparing students for college and career readiness.

Impact

Supportive structures reinforce high expectations across all constituencies and create commitment accountability among staff, students and families, thus providing a clear vision for the students' academic success via improved teaching practices.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal and her administrative team have created a tool based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching that sets high expectations for instruction, with emphasis on student engagement in critical and analytical thinking. This tool promotes mutual accountability through teacher reflection and self-assessment. Teachers use the tool to find successful strategies to implement the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, one teacher reflected in the tool that she increased questioning to elicit student responses that showed a deeper level of thinking.
- Teachers have ongoing opportunities to participate in staff development. The school's evolving professional development plan indicates regularly scheduled trainings in partnerships with consultants from City Year, Diplomas Now, International Institute for Restorative Practices and Teaching Matters. These trainings and partnerships support teachers and leaders with embedding clearly defined standards for teaching the whole child in a respectful environment and their work towards the goals of engaging all students in literacy and mathematical strategies.
- The school communicates high expectations for learning and next steps for students through multiple ways. Families, for example, regularly receive teacher notices, phone calls, school monthly calendar and student progress reports. Parents say they have access to an online program called *Pupil Path*. This program provides them with immediate teacher feedback in addition to emails they regularly receive informing them about student academic progress.
- The school arranges for ongoing opportunities to partner with and engage families. For example, parents have been invited to participate in teacher-led workshops about the content area standards and benchmarks. Additionally, parents have a voice in the decision-making via the School Leadership Team and by providing their input to the work of the Parent Teacher Association. They contribute to school improvements by suggesting partnerships and collaborations with community based organizations with the goal to offer career readiness opportunities.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers are beginning to differentiate tasks for groups of students. The use of multiple entry points to support student thinking and participation is inconsistent and uneven across the school.

Impact

Students, including English language learners (ELLs), students with disabilities (SWDs) and high achievers, have limited opportunities to demonstrate critical and analytical thinking in work products and classroom participation.

Supporting Evidence

- In one English language arts (ELA) class, students worked in flexible groups to discuss an excerpt from a class novel. Students responded to the task using a strategy to restate, explain, and connect and had access to laptops to complete their responses. Some students were in a Socratic seminar setting while a teacher typed their statements on the SMARTboard to make thinking visible. In another ELA class, however, all students annotated the same text and used only strategy for to write a short response.
- In a math class students were solving real life problems and pondering why it was useful to know the formula for area by connecting geometry to building the base for a house. In partnerships they arrived at the conclusion that if the area was not calculated correctly the building would collapse. However, in another math class, a teacher asked a question regarding solving a two-step equation and called only on a few students to answer it thus limiting opportunities for all learners to discuss a task.
- A review of student work in portfolios and on bulletin boards revealed some consistency in challenging students to read closely, conduct research for writing assignments and respond to informational text. For example, in a science class students learned about the different states and characteristics of matter and created a short story book from the view point of a water molecule, demonstrating understanding of the water phases. Some other content tasks, however, simply required students to answer questions associated with assigned texts and did not challenge students to extend their thinking or apply what they were learning to make independently deeper connections to the content being taught.
- Even though, students in most classrooms worked in groups and had opportunities to discuss tasks, they often were engaged in the same type of work. In some classes all students, including ELLs, SWDs and higher achievers, worked on the same problems with limited support at their level. In one math class, for example, the teacher introduced stations for solving positive and negative associations and gave diverse students same tasks to work on. Although many students started using task cards with some graphs to solve problems, a group of ELLs was limited to depending on each other's native language support to understand the assignment.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Teachers and leaders ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and promote college and career readiness with emphasis on instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined unevenly using student work and data to develop rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all grades, subjects, and a diverse group of learners.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions are purposeful to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Academic tasks are designed to push student thinking across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- Unit plans indicate the school implements Core Curriculum programs, such as Expeditionary Learning in English Language Arts, Go Math and the new social studies scope and sequence. Teachers supplement these programs with lessons and units from the New York State (NYS) website Engage NY. Most unit plans feature higher level questions for discussions and written responses. For example, literacy units of study in grade 8 include tasks for students have to analyze and cite textual evidence to support claims and to draw conclusions.
- Curriculum maps across the grades and subjects indicate that teachers plan for student research in informational reading and writing, including science and social studies. For example, in grades 6, 7, and 8 in ELA and social studies cross-curricular plans include research skills and strategies to incorporate findings that will support students with developing an argumentative essay to defend or refute a claim or to provide objective summaries with analysis of central ideas.
- A grade 6 unit plan on living things, cells and cell theory specifically lists tasks for ELLs and special education students to demonstrate their understanding of the sequence of events, and the cycle of the cell theory with the support of picture vocabulary materials. The unit plan also specified the use of graphic organizers, highlighters and index cards for tracking and showing sequence of events using illustrations.
- Most teachers plan differentiated tasks for identified students. The literacy lesson plans include independent practice for students who are on, below and above grade level. Guided and partner reading are planned for ELLs and SWDs. Specifically, the lesson plan goal, "Engaging in Collegial Discussion" based on a class included three differentiated activities for identified students. One task called for students to use post-its to find and discuss textual evidence. Another task was planned for students to use reciprocal reading conversation prompts while visuals and auditory tools would be provided to ELLs and SWDs to support them with understanding the novel.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Teachers use common assessments to monitor student progress towards grade and subject goals. The use of on-going checks for understanding to make instructional adjustments to meet all students' learning needs varies across the classrooms.

Impact

The school has a system for analyzing student work and tracking student achievement. However, in some classrooms teachers are not allowing students the opportunity to discover how to raise awareness of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across grades and content areas use a wide range of assessment tools such as rubrics, checklists and pre and post unit assessments. They use the results to monitor and track students' progress towards grade level goals. For example, ELA and math teachers create groups of students for academic intervention services based on the results of those common assessments.
- The administrative team is actively engaged in progress monitoring in collaboration with teachers. For example, the school has a system of tracking current student data to measure student growth towards Common Core Learning Standards benchmarks. The most recent ELA assessment was disaggregated by grade level and individual classes and published by a data specialist. Currently, grade 6 students have shown 28% growth in Common Core Learning Standards 6.2 (Determining a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details) and 25% growth in Common Core Learning Standards 6.4 (Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text grade standard).
- Teacher teams analyze student work analysis to discuss student improvement towards grade level goals and to outline strategies they can implement to better support student learning. The vertical math teacher team, for example, made recommendations for addressing the needs of students that are below, above and on grade level on a practice math test that mimicked the NYS Math test. Teachers looked for trends and misconceptions and compiled noticings on instructional and academic challenges. In addition, 8th grade teachers made recommendations to one another such as specifically reviewing integers and exponents and student understanding of when to divide and/or subtract.

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

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that focus on the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and work toward school improvement goals. School leaders encourage teachers to contribute to school's instructional decisions.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved pedagogy and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards aligned curricula. Teachers have opportunities to lead initiatives that improve learning outcomes for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade level horizontal teams and vertical content instructional teams meet regularly to examine the school's implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards in units of study and integration of the instructional shifts. Teachers also recommended the implementation of the Go Math program to afford students transitioning from elementary schools the continuity in mastering math problem solving. Similarly, teachers and leaders align literacy units of study with the Common Core Learning Standards by implementing more rigorous tasks to meet the school goal to improve student achievement in reading and writing.
- Teachers have opportunities to discuss their teaching approaches and techniques when they meet in teams. For example, the Academic Coaching at Ericsson (ACE) team plans lessons that show that all content area teachers, including health and art, implement strategies for student feedback and embed writing and note-taking in their units of study. Specifically, the health teacher stated through his participation on the ACE team and collaboration with the ELA department he has grown professionally and is incorporating literacy strategies in his class to promote writing, and student engagement in discussions and questioning.
- Teachers say that many of them conduct workshops for their colleagues, and participate in inter-visitations across grades and content areas. The professional learning plan, team meeting agendas and sign in sheets show evidence that many teachers are leading professional learning opportunities for their colleagues. Teachers also say that professional collaborations support their capacity building, especially in improving student engagement in questioning and discussions, one of the school's goals.
- Leadership has supported teacher-led initiatives such as the creation of the Academic Coaching at Ericsson. Teachers lead this team and plan lessons and units for the program targeting, at the same time, identified students. They also suggested extending the program for readers who are above grade level.