



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The McKinley Park School

Elementary School K127

**7805 Seventh Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11228**

Principal: Agatha Alicandro

**Date of review: January 21, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

The McKinley Park School is an elementary school with 519 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 23% Hispanic, 50% White, 25% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 27% 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 94.2%.

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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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		
<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

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are embedded within this school.

Impact

There are shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During an inquiry team meeting, four teachers of grades 4 and 5 discussed their inquiry study entitled *Mathematically Speaking*, which is focused on math vocabulary. The team reviewed work of fourth and fifth grade students to decide what actions to take for each group. They also reviewed and edited the “Word of the Week” graphic organizer to better correlate with mathematics, and then aligned rubrics and checklists to the graphic organizer. On a rubric for math vocabulary, the team discussed revising the titles of the different gradations to those titles familiar to their students, like changing “excellent/advanced” to “expert,” “good/proficient” to “practitioner,” “fair/needs improvement” to “apprentice,” and “poor/needs improvement” to “novice.” From their research, this team noticed that interactive word walls were very helpful to their students, so they started with a small inquiry group and now they are expanding these interactive word walls to all classes.
- Enhanced vocabulary is the focus of each individual teacher team during this school year. “Each team is molding it to their own needs,” said Principal Alicandro. Last year, in an effort to incorporate more math vocabulary into their lessons, the upper-grade math teacher team shared how a graphic organizer using synonyms and antonyms did not work well for them. “The meaning of a numerator is not the opposite of denominator,” said a teacher. The team tweaked the graphic organizer by using “example” and “non-example” to show understanding, such as compatible and non-compatible numbers. “We had trusted the program to teach vocabulary, but we’ve now shifted the trust to ourselves,” said one teacher. “This work has made me more aware of the words that I use,” said a team member. “I find myself saying words twice, in mathematical language and in commonly-used language.” Teachers stated words which current 4th graders should know will appear on a mid-chapter assessment to be administered in 3-4 weeks. A pre-test administered in October did not have a writing component to see if students used any of the words, so the team plans to incorporate these words in the mid-chapter assessment.
- Teachers rotate team meeting roles and responsibilities, including leader, recorder, data collector, and timekeeper. “Inquiry comes from the teachers,” said Principal Alicandro. “We gave them the tools they needed and we have a discussion about data...what we learned from last year and our goals. At the end of the year, teachers share their findings with other teachers during a “Share Fair.” Last year, third grade teachers focused their inquiry study on comparative text. Articulation among the departmentalized upper-grade teacher teams and teams for the lower grades is currently informal. However the team is planning to begin sharing their meeting minutes with the 3rd grade teacher team. The team mentioned that GO Math! has a component called “Getting ready for fourth grade,” which they plan to incorporate into their lessons.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are consistently emphasized in the school's curricula and academic tasks. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data. However, English language arts (ELA) unit plans did not offer detailed supports for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Impact

A diversity of learners across grades and subjects have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged. The school has incorporated detail regarding planned ELLs instructional supports specific to each unit will strengthen unit implementation and outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is using GOMath!, which it supplements with content from EngageNY, Everyday Mathematics and enVisionMATH. Many teachers have also incorporated authentic tasks from *Exemplars* to help with short responses and the performance tasks they created. Principal Alicandro stated, "Everyday Mathematics had some good components but they were not aligned to the Common Core. We kept the games which kids loved from Everyday Mathematics, as well as the enrichment activities and reference books for teachers to use as resources." In ELA, the school uses the *Journeys* reading program, which it is supplementing with content from *Sadlier's Vocabulary Workshop*. It has also maintained the reading and writing workshops from Teachers College. The writing teacher for grades 4 and 5 is Teachers College-trained and has been incorporating the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project units of study into the Journeys program. To support project-based learning in social studies and science, teachers incorporate *Science Studies Weekly Trailblazer* and *New World Studies Weekly* classroom magazines into their curriculum.
- Teachers engage students in conferencing and guided reading, which is supplemented with balanced literacy resources. Additional resources from the following intervention programs are also incorporated by teachers into the ELA curriculum maps to address the needs of student groups: Soar to Success, Wilson Foundations, Curious About Words, Handwriting Without Tears, and the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intensive System. However, the English language arts (ELA) unit plans did not offer detailed supports on the types of scaffolded support provided to ELLs other than "individually-leveled books."
- School-generated ELA curriculum maps for each grade include the Common Core Standards, big ideas, essential questions, content (key ideas, concepts), skills and strategies (verbs), lessons/activities and assessment projects, key vocabulary (unit word study), resources (textbooks, trade books, articles, websites, etc.), and levels of scaffolding (differentiation/Universal Design for Learning). The levels of rigor for each unit's essential questions are identified on the curriculum map using Depth of Knowledge (DOK). To address the diversity of learners, including ELLs and special education students, teachers plan tiered curricular activities including interventions, enrichment and extensions.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

All learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus statement reads: "Vocabulary comprehension, usage and language development in student to student discussions and writing will be enhanced, as evident through students' reading, writing and speaking by implementing a common core aligned vocabulary workshop in all K-5 classrooms." Teachers stated that they are "extending student's use of vocabulary to a more advanced and sophisticated level." In the art classroom, vocabulary posted for kindergarten students includes words such as curve, cool, warm, colors, imagine, realistic, fiction, long, short, dark, light, red, orange, yellow, blue, and green. These words were related to the students' creation of "abstract art using long and short curvilinear lines in the cool and the warm colors in the media of oil pastel." From this lesson, kindergarten students learned that red, orange and yellow are the warm colors and blue, green and purple are the cool colors. Teachers use SMARTboards to bring images, sounds, places, and time periods into the classroom. "Words of the Week" are used school wide, with a daily focus on the word's meaning, usage, synonym, and antonym.
- Teachers ensured that students were engaged in close reading of text, used accountable talk stems, and exercised choice in how they approached a task. Each option had a specific direction, checklist, and activity. For example, in a grade 4 ELA lesson on the elements of a fable, students chose from among the following *Journeys* activities: (a) *text-to-text*, in which students would compare the fictional ants in the fable, *The Dove and the Ant* to the real ant in *The Life and Times of the Ant*; (b) *text-to-self*, in which students would skim the text and make a list of five facts about ants that they found interesting or strange, or (c) *text-to-world*, in which students would use reference texts and internet search engines to research and take notes on two species of ants, like fire ants, army ants or carpenter ants. Students worked in groups based on their selected activity and adopted group work roles, including leader, recorder, timekeeper, materials manager, and presenter. Written guidance was provided by the teacher to students on the responsibilities of each group work role. In addition, there were text-to-text questions for students to ask themselves, such as: "Did I reread both texts? Did I answer all questions? Did I create a list using text details? Did I compare my list with a partner?" Associated vocabulary displayed on cards with photographs and sample usage in sentences included such words as transport, social, chamber, obstacles, scarce, transfers, reinforces, excess and exchanges.
- The objective of a grade 5 math lesson was, "Students will be able to use models to subtract fractions with unlike denominators." Debriefing with her class, the teacher said, "I noticed that everyone was working well. Some people chose to use fraction sticks, charts, and tiles. I heard accountable talk using words like circle graph, pie chart, and lowest common denominator." A student described her group's process: "We turned our fractions into common denominators and used our circle graph to help us."

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Students are provided with actionable and meaningful feedback. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students’ learning needs. Students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers gather a wide range of relevant data across subjects, enabling them to understand and plan effectively to improve individual student and subgroup performance and progress. The school accesses NYC Schoolnet to administer baseline assessments for ELA, math and science. Teachers maintain data folders, the contents of which are monitored by administration and used by academic intervention providers. Student work, written and online diagnostic assessments, and content-specific performance tasks are used by teachers to track student mastery, like the pre- and post-unit assessments from GO Math!, Sadlier’s Vocabulary Workshop, and the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments are administered three times during the school year to track independent reading progress. Teacher-created assessments are also used. For example, a self-assessment was created for an earthquake research project to help students judge whether all required elements of the project were included. Parents stated that they receive monthly progress sheets for their children. “Our job is to sign it, which teaches kids to be responsible,” said a parent. “My child made student of the month following feedback from her teacher on how to improve,” said another parent. In response to a question about how they know if they’re doing well academically, a student stated, “When you get good grades and you feel like you understand. When teachers give you good grades, it means you’re learning a lot. Some of us are trying to get to junior high school.”
- Teachers use a variety of checks for understanding, such as on-demand writing, checklists, and student responses on Post-It Sticky Notes. Students complete exit slips to monitor student understanding of the “Words of the Week.” While grade 4 students engaged in journaling facts and details connected to a unit on persuasive writing, the teacher used a checklist to capture each student’s progress in topic selection and position statement. Following a lesson in which grade 2 students took turns in their leveled reading groups asking and answering their own student-generated questions about the story *Violet’s Lesson* by author Angela Johnson, students completed a written self-assessment, which asked: “Did I talk about the question in my group? Did I use accountable talk? Did I listen to the members of my group? What did I learn in my group today?”
- Written reflections in student portfolios demonstrate student awareness of their next steps as a result of conferencing with their teacher. For example, a grade 4 student most recently wrote: “My next step in writing is to improve my spelling and punctuation. To improve in these areas, I will check my spelling and use periods and commas.” On a previous reflection from a different lesson, the student wrote that his next step would be to “focus on most important details.” Students knew to place a Post-It with their name on a project status list posted on chart paper entitled *Where Are We?* that served as a visual check of student progress.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide quality training to help meet these expectations. Expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness are effectively communicated to families.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations exists among staff and families in support of college and career readiness expectations for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Principal Alicandro disseminates the *McKinley Monthly* to the entire school community, which communicates upcoming activities, students of the month, the book of the month, and news from each grade level and cluster teacher about the month's units of study. Parents said they look forward to reading what's happening on all grade levels. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA), student council, community partners, all contribute. Support staff, including English as a second language (ESL) teachers and intervention providers also contribute announcements and/or suggestions for supporting student achievement at home. Principal Alicandro also disseminates a weekly memorandum intended to set the tone and communicates expectations for the week.
- Home-school connections are strong at this school. Each Friday, classrooms are open for parent visits. A parent shared, "I love the Family Fridays! I learn so much by being in the classroom. The teacher reinforces what I've been saying to my child about the use of words." To encourage more parent partnerships, the school's parent coordinator facilitates adult beginner English classes every Monday and Wednesday morning from January through March. "They go out of their way to create opportunities for parent participation...the culture is to ask what we can do better?" said another parent. Parents were invited in December to an event entitled "A Cup of Coffee and A Scope of Info" to talk about the school with the principal, assistant principal, and parent coordinator. Mid-year parent informational meetings were held in January at each grade level to discuss such topics as the importance of and school-wide focus on vocabulary, the variety of assessments used, the district grading policy, promotion criteria, discipline, and technology resources like eChalk and ThinkCentral. Parents on the School Leadership Team talked about curriculum review meetings they've attended to discuss changes. One parent said, "We've talked about departmentalization, and how students gain more from the particular departmentalized subject because teachers are more focused." Another parent mentioned the weight of the students' book bags, which have gotten heavier because they don't want to forget to bring anything. It's about responsibility and being organized. It teaches them independence." Parents said they love that the school is multicultural, and that the parent coordinator knows the students' names. Some teachers speak Arabic and Mandarin. Parents serve as Learning Leaders and network on behalf of other parents. "We're in a global world and there's a lot of cross-cultural understanding needed. Our kids have a head start," said a parent.
- When asked whether schoolwork was hard or easy, a student replied: "It starts out easy in the early grades and then it gets harder. We get a good education. Middle school will be even harder. If I study and do everything right, I will be prepared for the future." Students serve on the school's Student Council. A parent who attended the induction ceremony of the Council stated, "It's important that students have role models."