



Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 135 Sheldon A. Brookner

Elementary School K135

**684 Linden Boulevard
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Trevlyn McRae

**Date of review: February 10, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins**

The School Context

P.S. 135 Sheldon A. Brookner is an elementary school with 669 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 89% Black, 6% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.0%.

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	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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	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:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across the classrooms, teachers use common assessments, samples of student work, summative test, and checks for understanding to provide actionable feedback regarding student achievement.

Impact

Teachers' assessment practices based on actionable and meaningful feedback translate into formative feedback, as well as student self-assessments, resulting in student awareness of next learning steps regarding student achievement to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across all grades analyze a plethora of data such as unit tests, baseline assessments, chapter tests, performance-based tasks, independent reading assessments, Fountas and Pinnell independent reading levels, and student writing, as a lens into student mastery of skills. Teachers use findings to adjust instructional decisions at the school and classroom levels.
- To align with student learning needs, teachers analyze student data to identify trends across grade levels and to modify practices. Hence, the math instructional focus addresses learning outcomes surfaced from the examination of last year's State test. Teachers in upper grades adjust instruction to front-load concepts within the Base 10 Number System, particularly number sense in understanding place value of large numbers. Teachers also "shuffle concepts" on the curriculum map, moving challenging or prevalent concepts like graphing skills to earlier in the year in support of better student outcomes and to meet all students' learning needs.
- The goal of increasing academic achievement in the areas of literacy and math is anchored in students knowing individualized next steps. One student explained the goal setting process, "Teachers write on post-it notes to give next steps to help increase our grade to level 4". The use of rubrics and teacher feedback aligned to the school's curricula is a consistent practice across classrooms. During the small group interview, students astutely commented that they use rubrics to follow steps for accurate work, increase of grades to a higher level, make work better, and assess peers.
- Checks for understanding are common practices as evidenced by visitations across classrooms. Teachers employ techniques, such as "think-pair-share" and "turn-and-talk" to gain on-the-spot feedback to instigate effective adjustments to lessons. Students use red, yellow, and green colored cards to demonstrate progress toward learning objectives. The use of the thumbs up/thumbs down hand signal provokes further explanation of directions given to kindergartners making clear the objective of the task. As evidenced during a lesson on habitats, teacher assessment of the low number of students who raised their thumbs to show they understood directions prompted the teacher to draw a beehive to clarify and demonstrate the concept of habitat. In a second grade classroom, prior to an opportunity to turn-and-talk with a classmate about evidence from the text that supported character analyses, students used a checklist to evaluate the strength of their argument.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practices aligned to the curricula reflect the uniform use of a range of strategies that consistently providing multiple entry points. While these practices were present in some classrooms, practices were not observed in a vast majority of classrooms.

Impact

Students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, are exposed to an engaging curricula and appropriately challenging tasks and strategies that are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and instructional shifts. These challenging tasks are presented to students consistently in some classrooms, but do not strategically lead to high-quality supports and extensions for all, at varying cognitive levels across grades.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers incorporate the “I do, you do, we do” instructional model into their lessons. This is evident in cooperative learning environments. Teachers make purposeful decisions about groupings, materials, roles assigned to students, and tasks. In four out of the seven classrooms visited, teachers' questioning techniques prompted relevant discussions and higher-order thinking. For instance, questioning techniques in math classes promote the development of higher-order thinking such as, "What model can we use here?" and "Why is this model more efficient?" These questions did encourage students to make connections, apply prior learning, justify their thinking, and extend the learning of others.
- The use of graphic organizers and manipulatives produce opportunities for entry into rigorous lessons for the majority of students. Tiered activities and the use of content-specific vocabulary appropriately challenge students increasing their ability to produce meaningful work products. However, in some classrooms, the absence of strategic use of supports that extend learning and support the development of higher-order thinking is limited. In a fourth grade Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) classroom, students mimicked the teacher's use of academic vocabulary to discuss their reasoning for models used to identify equivalent fractions in the simplest form. However, in a fifth grade classroom, the skill of compare and contrast to cite text-based evidence was teacher dominated. In addition, some questions did not stimulate or generate high-level discussion. Some sample question included, “Why doesn't Mei Li like her new home?” or "Does that support why she doesn't like her new home?"
- Entry into lessons in early grade classrooms tended to lack appropriate supports and scaffolds for all learners. A phonics lesson in one kindergarten classroom required students to blend sounds of letters to make a one-syllable word and in another kindergarten classroom, students studied and matched animals to habitats. All students attended to the tasks. However, there were some early finishers, with limited engagement and opportunities for students to activate higher-order thinking skills.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Schools leaders and faculty ensure curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards across all subjects and grades, inclusive of instructional shifts. Academic tasks consistently matched to standards emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Curricula are anchored in key decisions, build coherence, and promote college and career readiness. The content and skill development enables access to demanding curriculum for a variety of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders and faculty chose ReadyGen and Go Math! because these curricula are Common Core-aligned. To promote coherence, faculty made purposeful key decisions to these programs to include the use of lessons from the Envision Math program and components of the balanced literacy methodology, which informs curricular planning as well as the integration of instructional shifts. For instance, lessons embed the needs of students, making accessible the ability to understand number operations, namely place value, and written assignments that require synthesizing information from multiple sources.
- Curriculum maps reviewed indicate unit and lesson plans are modified according to student readiness. Reciprocal teaching, planned questions at literal and critical thinking levels coupled with text-based evidence in science and social studies, and writing samples reflect attention to goal of college and career readiness. Curriculums incorporate “thin and thick” questions, revisions to math concepts, and infuse the writing process to ready students for next level learning.
- Teachers work collaboratively in horizontal and vertical teams to further develop curricula based on their “unpacking” of the ReadyGen units of study. Front-loading of vocabulary and adjustments to the pacing of modules ensure the delivery of instruction is in line with the Citywide Instructional Expectations across all grades. The school develops curricula to meet the needs of all learners, with particular attention to English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations for learning to families and students. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

High expectations connected to college and career paths promote academic responsibility for learning. Students receive support for next level learning through targeted feedback and appropriate measures of growth.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents are regularly provided with information on student performance and progress. Interim progress reports identify challenges in learning with suggestions to parents on how to help at home. School leaders engage parents as active participants on math and literacy committees and on the School Leadership Team. Information shared from collaborations conveys high expectations for learning and reinforces the importance of academic achievement.
- Parent workshops emphasize the culture for learning established by school leaders and teachers. Relevant school and parent resources such as Parent Corps, a General Education Development Program, and Common Core informational sessions involve parents in the education process. Parents commented, their children experience a “well-rounded education that raises the bar for success”.
- Newsletters, pamphlets, emails, phone blasts, and parent-student events, such as award assemblies, Project Share-outs, Read-a-Thon, and Book-and-Beyond Assemblies engage parents and students in appropriate learning activities. These activities reinforce the focus on achievement with regard to helping families understand expectations and the value placed on student achievement.
- Students excitedly expressed that their teachers are aware of students’ progress in class via many strategies. Fifth graders spoke about the Growth Mindset model that helps them to “expand their minds and achieve more.” As stated by one student, the expectation is to realize that they are smart enough to achieve their dreams. Another student shared that the teacher told him the word “fail” represents the “first attempt in learning”.
- High expectations for learners in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms reflected in age-appropriate rubrics empower students’ understanding of their progress. Checklists also supported by visual cues fostering next level expectations toward grade level standards. The use of grade- and age-appropriate rubrics to promote student self-assessment is a common practice across the school.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in regularly scheduled professional collaborations. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work.

Impact

These professional collaborations support expectations in line with Common Core Learning Standards, strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Practices of teacher teams promote instructional coherence that results in improved teacher pedagogy and refinement to curricula that undergirds progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Fourth grade teachers use the Tuning Protocol to evaluate the delivery of lessons that are planned and executed based on the Japanese Lesson Study Model, a teaching improvement process. Supportively, colleagues debrief an observed lesson and provide warm and cool feedback to stimulate refinement to tasks for groups of students or to influence effective lesson planning and implementation for spiral teaching.
- Grade leaders serve as facilitators “responsible for keeping the grade together”. As such, the teacher with the most experience on each grade meets regularly, in vertical configurations, discusses concerns, explores trends in data, and problem-solves with an eye towards school-wide improvement. This work engenders the integration of a unit on fractions and the introduction of division, third grade concepts, into the second grade math curriculum.
- Across grades, teacher teams analyze student work to build capacity in teaching and to advance progress for groups of students. Students in lower grades are encouraged to annotate text, speak in complete sentences, and connect ideas in writing. Teachers in the vertical team are engaged in “up the ladder work”, to spiral standards from one grade to another. This work helps to inform lesson planning and adjustments to curricula that keep teachers focused on what students need to know to be successful at the next learning level. Additionally these vertical team members also have the responsibility of sharing the work toward strengthening instructional capacity with their grade teams.