



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Beacon School of Excellence

Elementary School K172

**825 4th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11232**

Principal: Giacomo Spatola

**Date of review: May 1, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Anita Skop**

The School Context

Beacon School of Excellence is an elementary school with 585 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 4% Black, 78% Hispanic, 12% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.0%.

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	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts, as well as by discussions at the team and school levels, so that teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula.

Impact

All learners, including English language learners, (ELLs), and students with disabilities, (SWDs), are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills resulting in high quality student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's core belief system is voiced by the principal who grounds instruction in a student-centric approach. "The student is the whole reason for everything. Every child can meet and exceed the standards...no excuses." School leaders and the staff uniformly utilize the workshop model with a focus on language development and vocabulary through read alouds. The read aloud pacing has been expanded to 60 minutes to give students the opportunity to write about their listening and reading and increase the focus on vocabulary. For example, in a third grade integrated co-teaching class, one teacher read from *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. Students were then asked to turn and talk about the relationship between Peter and Fudge. One student commented, "I agree with Fatima, because in the blurb it says that Fudge isn't so sweet." Teachers circulated listening in and taking notes and a speech provider, sitting with a small group as part of the circle, supports students with key vocabulary and language picture cards. The literacy coach is watching the entire process and taking notes so she can help teachers deepen their skills.
- Instructional practices are consistently designed to plan for a range of multiple modalities. To this end, all service providers and out of classroom clusters are utilized as collaborative teachers assigned to a grade level. This provides for constant individualization and enables all classes to provide teacher support during small group instruction, so that rather than 30 students working with one teacher, the ratio is 30 students working with four skilled teachers, addressing data defined needs for at-risk students during actual classroom instruction on a daily basis. In addition, classroom teachers grow their pedagogic skills from observing and emulating the strategies utilized by the intervention personnel. For example, support clues for decoding strategies shared by the speech providers that had been taped to their students' desks were then shared school wide to support other struggling students.
- Planning for multiple modalities includes addressing the social/emotional needs of students to ensure they have access to learning opportunities. "Wiggly students," who have a hard time focusing, benefit from a series of modifications such as hand-strengthening tools, wedges, and slant boards, that were shared by the occupational therapist. This completely integrated approach to intervention now helps the classroom teacher to coherently provide supports to students all day long.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, track progress, and adjust curricular and instructional decisions. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

All students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery of Common Core standards-aligned skills and all students are aware of their next learning steps, as a result of teachers effectively adjusting instruction to meet students' learning needs. However, enhancing student self-assessment to deepen student self-identification of next steps is already a priority at this very high functioning school.

Supporting Evidence

- All forms of student work output are the foundation of instructional decisions. State summative assessments, anecdotal evidence from student discussions, unit assessments in math, and performance tasks and rubric-driven writing, are evaluated at the school, team, and class level, and are routinely used to monitor student growth and adjust curricular and instructional decisions through a process of back-mapping from the assessment. In addition, teachers maintain conference notebooks for every student and use these notebooks to monitor student progress and mastery as well. The notebooks then travel from grade-to-grade with the student and enable teachers to track growth over the course of years. Further, teachers and school leaders have consistently refined their common assessments to ensure that they are well aligned to the Common Core. For example, seeking to ensure accuracy of Fountas and Pinnell reading levels, the school has earmarked specific books for each level as benchmarks with guides to ensure that reading stamina is included in the student evaluations.
- Based on the findings on student evaluations, the school has made a number of adjustments to the curricula. For example, units of study in writing and in math that required similar skills were moved into closer proximity through revised pacing so that teachers and students were better able to gauge mastery at a deep level. In addition, writing rubrics were adjusted to include targeted skills so that students were able understand the learnings being addressed. In addition, the time frame for read aloud instruction was expanded to 60 minutes to better address the needs of the large population of English language learners and former English language learners.
- Classroom visits evidenced the use of exit tickets, extensive teacher conferencing, and other forms of checks for understanding, such as hand gestures like fist-to-five, thumb-o-meter, and students holding up work products, so that the teacher can see how many students completed the task with understanding. Additionally, interviews with students and the examination of student work further supported student peer- and self-assessment through the use of rubrics, checklists, and peer conferences. Further, students were able to clearly describe their strengths and needs. Nevertheless, independent identification of next steps is now being prioritized for upper grade students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core and content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact

Curricular coherence across grades and subject areas promotes college and career readiness for all students and it is expected that all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking through instructional activities.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers always start off meetings with clear goals using data to assess student learning. All data, which is gathered from formative assessments, is shared school-wide. The assessments results show that all students moved on formative assessments and also moved on standardized tests. Teachers focused particularly on English language learners who have Individualized Education Programs by looking at their New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test. They noticed a need to address acquisition of greater vocabulary. As they had been working on vocabulary, they identified a two-tiered approach and piloted it in classes with the support of coaches and administration.
- The curriculum was developed collaboratively and shared with the intervention and service providers. All teaching staff is very strategic about how and when they implement the curriculum's units, such as starting with essay-based writing at the start of the school year to build on that skill. During every read aloud, the text is projected on a PowerPoint and students write about their reading. This had made a huge impact in the quality of student writing throughout the year.
- Teacher teams meet twice weekly to review student work and tweak the curriculum. They engage in ongoing reflection and reevaluation of the EngageNY curriculum to make it more constructivist and deepen student engagement. In kindergarten, it's more game-based learning with additional lessons to empower students to self-assess. Teachers plan opportunities for student responses to evaluate impact, determine how questioning has enhanced the rigor and developed student skills across all content areas. School-based assessment data shows the continued progress of student achievement from baseline to midline to end line in performance assessments. This growth corresponds with student State assessments, which show students consistently exceeding standards compared to peer and citywide schools.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations (professionalism, instruction, communication, and other elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching) to the entire staff, and provide training. The school effectively communicates expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability for high expectations among teachers and school leaders, and teachers and staff at the school successfully partner with families to support student progress toward those high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's Weekend News bulletin came out of the need of the large English language learner population that needed extra convention and writing support. It is a steady consistent piece of writing that can be used to measure growth over time for all grades from kindergarten to grade 5. There is transparency and consistency because information from writing prompts to student writing responses is shared with all constituents. By highlighting rigorous student writing for English language learners in the bulletin for parents, school partners and other constituents, teachers, and students, concretely improve writing using early drafts and standards-aligned rubrics as guides and showcase the final draft by publishing in the bulletin.
- There is a twice monthly parent workshop. One held during the day and one held at night. The workshop is based on the grade-level curriculum where teachers go over the coming unit of study and materials that students will be using. Teachers provide differentiated support to parents with video models of homework, blogs for parents, parent calls, and letters to parents by grade. The data on Google Drive is shared with parents as they are seen as core constituents.
- Teachers push themselves to individualize instruction as each student is looked at as a whole entity. Teachers select one student each day from pre-kindergarten through grade 5 to share their writing with the whole school. Students are expected to engage with complex text and non-fiction. Text complexity is supported with read alouds and math open-ended tasks build student stamina. Students engage in conversations and give each other feedback. English language learners comment on how their English skills are developing and demonstrate pride in their quality of work.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promoted the implementation of Common Core (including the instructional shifts), and teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work.

Impact

As a result of engaging in inquiry-based collaboration, there is school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners through shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. Consequently, students consistently exceed standards in median adjusted growth percentile as compared to both peer and citywide measures.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly for 80 minutes and teachers voted through a school-based option for daily communication with one another which is evidence of their commitment to working collaboratively. The teams’ goal is a highly effective focus of student ownership and each teacher is piloting methodologies in a no-risk environment. The support system includes all personnel from administration to related services providers. Administrators attend one meeting a week.
- The ongoing work of the grade and vertical teams is to review student work. Coaches and teachers collaboratively determine student learning needs based on reflections of student writing. For example, a senior teacher had her own perspective as to how things could be done when another teacher developed a Google Drive with resources. As a result of this collaboration, teachers saw a significant increase in the use of text examples in student writing.
- The expectation is that everyone is a valued colleague and that administration is building capacity in everyone. This willingness by teachers to learn and learn from one another led to the creation of additional positions including an assistant principal, two coaches in math, and two coaches in literacy. Teachers and staff routinely commented on their ability to make instructional decisions that impact teaching and organizational options school-wide. Teacher successes are highlighted by administration and the integration of all teachers and paraprofessionals creates a culture of believability in everyone’s own capacity to be the best educator.