



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 215 Morris H. Weiss

Elementary School K215

**415 Avenue S
BROOKLYN
NY 11223**

Principal: Antonella Bove

Date of review: January 22, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Sheila S. Gorski

The School Context

Morris H. Weiss is an elementary school with 959 students from grade prekindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 4% Black, 24% Hispanic, 50% White, and 20% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93%.

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 | 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

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

The vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry based-structured professional collaborations systematically analyzing classroom practice, student work and data for targeted students encouraging mastery of goals for student groups.

Impact

Teacher instructional capacity and student achievement is strengthened via systematic student data-analysis and well-thought-out work of teams, supporting Common Core aligned practice, which results in school-wide instructional coherence.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams examine student strengths and needs, and use that information and a clear plan for lesson adjustments. For example, the team was observed using a, “Looking at Student Work Protocol” typically used to guide their discussions. Teachers documented their common concern, possible ways to address the concern, and the Common Core Learning Standard being addressed. They also discussed possible ways to do things differently in the lesson, the students being addressed, and the entry points for those students, as well as, the focus for the concern.
- Teams of teachers engage in lesson summaries to create a tailored lesson plan using the following criteria: a standard, a teaching target, materials, differentiation, entry points, and possible graphic organizers. In collaboration with the grade teacher, the team plans the lesson presented by one teacher at the next meeting, while the others observe, reflect on the lesson and finally each teacher will teach the lesson in their class followed by another reflection. Based on the, *Tuning Protocol* a lesson study engages the team in professional dialogue with clarifying questions embedded as they examine a lesson. This is followed by a reflection pause and a warm and cool feedback session. The team adds more time to reflect on the feedback, which allows for an informed debrief.
- During a team meeting, teachers analyzed the written responses of four students which having read the text, *Don't Dry up Frogs*, would answer the question, “What does the narrator mean when she says that there are many surprises when you do detective work? Using the strategy to restate, answer, cite and explain (RACCE) their thinking students wrote a paragraph that required citing two pieces of evidence. Students A, B, C and D were targeted for possible trends and learning gaps depicted across subjects. A teacher presented the cases providing context for the work of each student. All four students were provided with different graphic organizers to help them organize their thinking and rubric 11 for citing evidence. During the reflection, the team discussed their findings. Students identified the comparison, but not the contrast, and the writing lacked evidence. Lesson adjustments decided on include, in-depth questioning to heighten the rigor, modeling, breaking down the task into smaller parts for some, and giving other students research choices.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teachers use instructional strategies to provide consistent opportunities for all students to engage in challenging tasks. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

While all teachers use questioning techniques and scaffolds to encourage student engagement in lessons, the strategic use of supports and extensions leading to in-depth levels of thinking, participation, and ownership of learning varies across some classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, it is noted that resources such as, experience charts, student parking lots and content and subject area word walls are available for student use. Students were observed using graphic organizers, visual aids, and supports. For instance, T-charts, accountable talk prompts and problem-solving techniques, laptops or iPads were used by students during group work.
- During some classroom visits, efforts were also noted of the consistent use of scaffolds such as, graphic organizers and student choice of a preferred style for learning that included the use of technology for reading a text or a hard copy of the text. During a fifth grade classroom visit, students reading, *"The Westing Game"*, indicated understanding of their roles and were discussing the topic. However, when asked if they knew why they were in the group, students hesitantly answered, "Because we have to do the work that's on the chart!" pointing to a chart on an easel. Students were provided with numerous graphic organizers, such as a Venn diagram or a T-chart. Yet, their responses to the question regarding why they were using a T-chart were, "I need practice using a T-Chart". Students participated in group activities, and knew subsequent steps to take, but also indicated limited involvement in group choices and the use of resources and how those resources support their learning and extended their thinking.
- In a second grade, class students were using clues and illustrations to describe and compare their character's traits using text-based evidence. Each group was reading a different book and engaged in activities. For instance, all groups could choose a character of choice for which they would identify internal and external character traits. Students were provided with a variety of graphic organizers they could use based on the activity. Some students could use a comparison/contrast graphic organizer to identify internal and external traits for two main characters from two different texts, while other students could use a T-Chart, and yet others a Venn Diagram. Some students could write a response to an open-ended question, such as, "If you were a character in one of your books, who would you be friends with? Explain your answer." All activities required the students to run a checklist of their work. One called for a check of the work compiled and graphic organizers used, another required a check on justifying, analyzing, comparing and explaining their responses.

Additional Findings

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| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Proficient |
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Findings

The school leaders and staff ensure a Common Core aligned curricula, making focused decisions and building coherence. Teachers use data and student work to make refinements to the curricula, encouraging access to the curricula for a diversity of learners.

Impact

Across grades and subjects, curricular and academic tasks are aligned to the Common Core expectations and data results inform refinements to the curricula, so that students have access to the curricula promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school goal to align all content areas to the Common Core Learning Standards is realized this school year as it implements units of study designed by teachers to support writing for English language arts and continue to analyze the *ReadyGen* program to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Additionally, in math the school uses the *GoMath* program to develop lessons that include real-life experiences and conceptual understanding. Teachers create academic math tasks leveraged by *GoMath!* and Exemplars as supplementary resources, providing for students step-by-step processes to engage students in math problem stories. Teachers also take an interdisciplinary approach to implementing the *New York City Social Studies Scope and Sequence* and science hand-on strategies supporting content information and skills in all areas.
- Curricular and academic task refinements are informed by weekly unit assessment results in both English language arts and math. Unit revisions comprise making connections between themes, knowledge, and enduring understandings reflected in lesson plans through mini-lessons, group activities, supports, graphic organizers. For example, Venn Diagrams are used to model details from the texts being read that support a theme depicted in two texts, *“Heart and Soul”* and *“Operation Clean Sweep”* or the teacher model strategy showing how figurative language contributes to the understanding of the theme of, “confidence” in both texts. Also included are questioning techniques such as, *“Based on this information, what conclusions can you draw about how each author builds up the theme?”*
- The interdisciplinary approach in fourth grade science and social studies depicts modifications and highlights a performance standard, the key student learning objective, a sequence of learning activities, key texts, assessments, and a list of entry points. A science unit on why energy is important included several performance standards, such as, Energy exists in various forms: heat, electric, sound, chemical mechanical, and light. A student learning objective requires students to explain the difference between kinetic energy and potential energy. The sequence of learning activities requires students to conduct temperature observations, and make a paper windmill. During Lab work students work with energy in motion, from food and saving fossil fuel. Key texts include, *How Bikes Work, by Judy Healy, and it’s Electric, by Greg Raza*. Aligned formal assessments are planned within the units and are teacher created on unit content. To support the learning for second language learners and special education students teachers include, photographs, videos, interactive websites, audio-books and vocabulary word towers.

Findings

All teachers across classrooms and grades examine student knowledge of content and skills, and make curricula adjustments. Teachers also track the growth of all students toward mastery of goals.

Impact

The vast majority of teachers use common assessments and practices to reflect a clear representation of student progress and make effective instructional adjustments to meet the needs of students, so that students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers across grades administer the *ReadyGen* and *GoMath!* weekly assessments, end of unit performance tasks and *Fountas & Pinnell* running records to track reading accuracy and comprehension. The results of these three assessments are used to inform student groupings, instructional discussions and decisions at team levels and professional development. For example, State math results for the third grade indicated that while the third grade showed improved passing scores, when compared to the *Go Math* assessment results there was a significant difference in that students were doing so much better in *GoMath!* assessments. Deeper analysis of the data revealed that the math program implemented had academic vocabulary gaps and did not align to the academic vocabulary used in State math exams. Additionally, there were not enough problem-solving stories built-in to the math program. Discussions among school constituencies and the network, coupled with research for support materials resulted in a decision to select, *Exemplars*, which the school has determined embeds real-life situations in the problem-solving stories affording students opportunities to make connections and glean deeper conceptual understanding in math stories.
- A review of lesson plans shows that checks for understanding are embedded in the lesson plans in numerous ways. For instance, in a fifth grade class, math questions are designed and asked during math talk. Some examples are: “How would you explain the importance of placing zeroes within the product?” and “How would you explain to a friend where the decimal point goes when multiplying electrical numbers?” Facilitated by the teacher, student questions are also posted on a parking lot chart and students have opportunities to visit the parking lot and answer each other’s questions assessing each other’s understanding, checking for clarity and to spark discussion. Lessons also include a variety of checklists and peer assessments. Additionally, student reflections require students to summarize, for example in math; students summarize the process for subtracting fractions and explain that when in a subtraction problem students must rename the mixed number.
- Students use teacher created rubrics to self and peer assess. A second grade informational writing, a student to student conference form is used by students to assess whether a topic was developed throughout the writing, organized, with adequate amount of facts, descriptions, and text features. The student is provided feedback via a glow and a grow. A fourth grade peer reflection on writing includes a noticing, about the partner’s reading, feedback as examples, and a recommendation to make their writing better. A multitude of rubrics measure writing, math, accountable talk such as, the Speaking and Listening Rubric used in the literature Circle to self and group assess their work.

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| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

School Leaders and stakeholders have established a culture for learning fostering high expectations linked to a path toward higher education, and partner with families supporting student progress toward meeting those expectations.

Impact

Structures are in place to support the school's high expectations, strengthening the school's culture and accountability among staff, students and their families, hence providing a clear path towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- From the onset, the staff handbook reinforces the principal's high expectations. Clear expectations regarding daily instruction and professional responsibilities, such as, the expectation for teachers to ensure they are focusing on higher-order, open-ended and rigorous questions that incorporate Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels and the instructional shifts also support the instructional focus to incorporate multiple entry points in all lessons. These are monitored through frequent classroom visits and periodic conversations. Professional development leveraged by the Danielson Framework for Teaching provides teachers with the ability to demonstrate their personal growth in pedagogy that increase student performance, progress and achievement. The instructional expectations via peer support, inter-visitations, or the onboard of newer teachers by mentors who conduct low-inference observations and provide feedback and engage teachers in professional discourse all contribute to the school's culture of high expectations,.
- The principal and assistant principals ensure that students understand the school's high expectations via upper house and lower house assemblies affording all students opportunities to be an integral part of the discussions regarding, for example, school work, homework, and the discipline code. The school includes and values student involvement via, Student Ambassadors, a group of students who select specific activities and clubs for fifth grade students. Through the K-Kids student program, a selected group of students plan and participate in community service projects titled, Learning Leadership through Service.
- The school websites affords both staff and families links to educational sites and technology that support the school's math and literacy curriculum and also provides access to texts aligned to the school's curriculum. Families are able to visit the websites and see what their children are learning. They also have access to the supports and are able to read the texts and learn how to support their children at home.
- School newsletters are sent to families twice a month to keep parents and families abreast of academics and events. These newsletters also provide suggestions parents can use at home to further encourage student improvement with parental support. These newsletters provide families clear and transparent communication concerning the school culture. Progress reports are also provided to families ensuring their understanding of periodic academic and personal progress of their children via this same link, elevating the communication to an ongoing and collaborative partnership.