



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

James P. Sinnott

Jr. High School 19K218

**370 Fountain Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11208**

Principal: Lisa Hermann

Date of review: December 4, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich

The School Context

James P. Sinnott is a junior high school with 464 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 42% Black, 36 % Hispanic, 1% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88%.

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	Developing
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	Underdeveloped
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	Underdeveloped
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	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations in teams that analyze assessment data and student work.

Impact

However, teacher team's inquiry work is developing and does not typically result in improved teacher practice or progress toward goals for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly by grade level formally, as well as informally. During the formal meeting they use inquiry protocols for looking at student work and data. The protocol has them determine what students do successfully, what students still need to learn, and then determine implications for teacher planning and preparation. Teachers rotate presenting a case conference or a group of students. As a result, teachers are developing methods for tracking the growth of these students and implications for planning and preparation. For example the English language arts (ELA) teacher team spoke about the balance between fiction and non-fiction, citing evidence to support arguments, and engaging students in discussions as main focus areas. The mathematics teacher team discussed incorporating multistep problems into the problem of the day and exit slips.
- Teachers are aware of students' Lexile levels, and a couple of them use this to support students in student goal-setting and achieving these goals. For example, these teachers place the student's Lexile level on individual portfolios and label the Lexile level of each article or story. As a result, the students can see that the piece will be a challenge, but within his/her reach and understand the reason for the scaffolding and assigned lunch-and-learn sessions.
- Administration supports teacher teams by providing training regarding data analysis to determine next steps. Additionally, they share a professional read, of The Power of Teacher Teams, by Troen and Boles, a collaborative teacher team book to support team growth.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Underdeveloped

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies typically do not provide multiple entry points or opportunities for student discussions.

Impact

Consequently, appropriately challenging tasks did not lead to a demonstration of higher-order thinking skills for students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and special education students. Further, the student work products and discussions reflect a general lack of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Administration stated that teachers demonstrate tracking student responses to questioning. However, this process was noted in one of seven classes visited. It was observed in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class implementing a Socratic seminar. One teacher recorded student participation within the fishbowl, and concurrently peers outside the fishbowl rated those within using a task-specific rubric.
- Administration stated that through questioning, classes would show student voice is strong with opportunities for conversation through turn-and-talk, stop-and-jot, and discussion. However, during the classroom visitations this was observed in only a couple of classes. The majority of time teacher voice dominated. A discussion occurred in a Socratic seminar. Elsewhere when questions were asked, the questions and answers remained in the teacher to student, student to teacher Ping-Pong pattern. Even in a class where students were divided into four groups of six, with an adult facilitator at each table, the format remained a smaller version of the whole class format, with the teacher leading each group of students and thus with little student voice projected and produced. Teachers directed the questions, and students answered the teacher. Student participation was uneven and limited to those who answered questions, creating a gap between those who spoke and those who did not.
- Administration stated that students receive scaffolds and multiple entry points to access the materials. Yet, only a couple of classes provided scaffolded materials, one as an exit ticket, and another as an activity in math for differentiated groups of students. In the other classes there were no apparent multiple entry points provided to individual or groups of students nor was there evidence of different materials provided for students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills inconsistently across grades and subjects. Curricula and academic tasks reflect the process of planning to provide students access.

Impact

This results in inconsistent access to rigorous curriculum that cognitively engages all students.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of the lesson plans and unit plans showed that curricula and academic tasks inconsistently demonstrate rigorous habits and higher order skills. For example, an English lesson required students to examine a poem and understand its current day implications. The homework required students to write their own poem using the one analyzed in class as a model. This poem had a current topic. Yet in an ICT science lesson, the atom was introduced but students were not required to do anything with the information in the opening activity.
- A review of lesson plans demonstrated an inconsistency of access for all students. For example, in a math lesson regarding slope, although there were instructional strategies listed for modifications or accommodations and students have a choice of partners, the scaffolding of the task was not evident in the lesson as all students were provided the same materials. There was no listing of students or tiers to receive differentiated materials. On the other hand, in an English language arts lesson plan based on a fictional article, there were explicitly delineated groups of students based on student Lexile levels, and scores on assignments and assessments. Additionally, this data determined the groupings and the activities for each group.
- During teacher team meetings, teachers explained that they meet to revise curricula by incorporating multiple points of access for students through the use of sentence starters, paragraph frames, frontloading vocabulary, and using small group activities. Additionally teachers spoke of beginning to demonstrate adaptations to curricula based on student need and best practices. However, in lesson plans and curriculum maps, multiple entry points as described above were inconsistently demonstrated. For example, only two of the seven lesson plans demonstrate student groupings based on data, such as Lexile Levels and Performance Series.

Findings

The school has common assessments, and the results are collected. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices do not reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student-self assessment.

Impact

As a result, school leaders and faculty have no clear portrait of student progress toward goals within and across grades and subjects. Consequently, the lack of checks for understanding does not allow for effective adjustments to lessons, which leads to student confusion.

Supporting Evidence

- Although administration and staff have adopted common assessments and implemented them, the analysis of data does not yet inform progress toward student goals. The school uses assessments from common core instructional materials for English language arts and mathematics. However, the school does not have a system in place schoolwide to determine students' progress toward goals. There are individual teachers who have developed their own method, but there is no systemic process. For example, one teacher of special education students uses student binders to track student goals, conferences, and their progress toward those goals. Additionally, administration stated that the teachers are in the process of creating goals for students, at the time of this report.
- Although teachers agreed that the goals set for students at the beginning of the year were based on Performance Series and state assessments, when asked about common assessments, teachers described different practices to measure progress of student achievement toward these goals. Yet, when asked for examples of student or groups of students' progress toward goals, administration and staff were unable to demonstrate it.
- Administration stated that across classes and subject areas, instructional practices demonstrate checking for student understanding, an area that is a focus this year. However, evidence of this was not observed across classes and subjects. For example, of the seven classes visited, only in one class did the teacher confer with students at tables and provide feedback to the whole group for clarification or redirection. In one class, during a Socratic seminar, teachers recapped to provide clarity for students in the fishbowl. In the other five classes, checking for student understanding was not observed during the classroom visitation.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders are in the process of consistently communicating high expectations to the staff. Teacher teams and staff are establishing a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

As a result of those expectations, school leaders are developing training and a system of accountability. To that end, teacher teams and staff are developing the level of detail and clarity needed to help prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct snapshot observations, in addition to the informal and formal observations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Administration has a transparent calendar of monthly observations. Additionally, administration provides professional development on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Inter-visitations are growing in use to share best practices.
- Teachers are beginning to offer actionable feedback to students that consistently provide next steps that help prepare them for the next level. For example, a review of student work on bulletin boards and in portfolios demonstrate a spectrum of feedback from none and no rating selection on the rubric, to a rating on a rubric without written actionable feedback and next steps, to both a rating on a rubric and written actionable feedback and next steps. During interviews some students were more adept at determining their own next steps when receiving little to no feedback, as opposed to others who could not.
- Teachers offer lunchtime tutoring, both prescribed and volunteer. Students spoke to this as an option for support to reach the expected levels. Students stated that they knew who to go to for support or advisement. However, their answers included various teachers, dean, counselor, administrators, and previous teachers. The school is developing a system for consistent supports.