



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Doris L. Cohen School

Primary School K230

**1 Albemarle Road
Brooklyn
NY 11218**

Principal: Maria Della Ragione

**Date of review: December 10, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Anita Skop**

The School Context

The Doris L. Cohen School is an elementary school with 1,319 students from grade Pre-K through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 32% Hispanic, 19% White, and 47% Asian students. The student body includes 31% English language learners and 8% 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 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	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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

In the vast majority of classrooms teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflected the uniform use of a wide range of strategies, modalities and materials to provide an array of entry points.

Impact

As a result of the plentiful variety of learning options, students are consistently engaged in rigorous learning experiences, see themselves as owners of their potential, and were able to engage in high level discussion, take ownership of their learning and produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The instruction was universally strong. Scaffolded supports and small group instruction aligned to student specific needs were evident in every class. Student interaction and ownership dominated all lessons. In a self-contained 12:1:1 bridge class of second and third graders, were taking part in a thematic unit of study about water. All students were engaged in conducting a science experiment. They were asked to determine whether or not salt made ice melt faster. A paraprofessional worked with each group of two children, while a group of three worked with the teacher. The language that was used was academic, “observation, hypothesis, conclusion, etc.” Student stirred the ice in both cups then drew and wrote about the results on a "lab report" template. No answers were given; questions prompted thinking. “What do you see in the cup? What is the difference between the two cups? Why do you think that happened?” A student answered, "The salt made the ice melt faster,” clear evidence of student ownership by all learners.
- Teachers made purposeful decisions on an ongoing basis so that strategies, including sequence post-its, “key parts” sheets, provided the supports needed for students to deepen their understanding and complete rigorous assignments at every level. For example, In a fifth grade classroom, the use of strategies enabled fifth grade English language learners to develop story maps as they read the book, Loser, while a group of beginners worked with an English as a second language teacher using post-its to sequence the story.
- Student ownership of work was highly evident throughout the school. In a fourth grade classroom, students worked in pairs to solve a real world mathematics problem about packing fudge squares in boxes for sale. Students self-selected a strategy to use and then were grouped in pairs according to their selection by posting their strategy on a poster and finding a mate. Students then worked in their pairs to solve the problem and demonstrate their solution to the class, while the teacher served as a facilitator and used questions to deepen thinking.

Area of Focus

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

All teachers and school staff are engaged in regularly scheduled collaborative teams that utilize an inquiry structure to routinely analyze and assess student work for a focused group of students, in line with the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts.

Impact

Professional collaborations, which include both vertical and horizontal teams, have resulted in improved teacher pedagogy, the expansion of shared successful practices and enhanced student achievement throughout the building. However, intensifying the fidelity to a universal inquiry protocol would enable teams to reflect more deeply on student work and data so that strategies are targeted, providing the teams with even more opportunities to meet student needs, expand achievement and accelerate success.

Supporting Evidence

- During the vertical team that was observed, teachers described how the Teachers College units of study were adapted to include more non-fiction reading and writing, and revised pacing that begins on “day one,” as the result of the work of professional collaborations and reflections on both the Common Core Learning Standards and the benchmarking of performance tasks and student work.
- In order to ensure that challenging opportunities were accessible to all students, and based on the evaluation of student growth by teachers of self-contained special education classes, thematic instruction was instituted across the grades, solidifying conceptual learning with the addition of unit specific academic language objectives across all content areas. This has then been expanded to support English language learners as well.
- Though the teams use an inquiry based protocol, a deeply embedded understanding of this structured cyclical protocol has not been fully developed by all participants. By providing greater training in a universal protocol school wide, teachers would deepen their findings when reflecting on student work, better be able to provide student specific strategies such as those seen in the self-contained class’s thematic unit science experiment.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Rigorous habits and higher order skills are consistently embedded in well-planned and highly refined, standards based curricula that use student work and data to ensure that all students, including English language learners and special needs students, are cognitively engaged in rich challenging tasks.

Impact

The curricula across all content areas, is frequently adjusted to provide pacing and strategy scaffolds guaranteeing that rich content area learning is highly accessible to all. Consequently, students in all grades and all classes are immersed in a coherent curriculum filled with critical thinking, writing and mathematical skills that enable them to seamlessly transition from grade to grade with true college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps seen and classroom visits indicated that the Teachers College curriculum for ELA and the Investigations curriculum for math were coherent throughout the school. Common Core Learning Standards are aligned and adjusted to meet the needs of students. In addition, rich content area instruction based on non-fiction research included thematic instruction that demanded extensive written work in line with the Chancellor's and citywide expectation from the earliest of grades.
- Teachers College units of study are frequently refined to meet the needs of students. While the units were deemed to be well organized to address instruction in the lower grades, upper grade units were re-aligned to better coordinate with the interdisciplinary curriculum based social studies topics.
- Teachers made purposeful decisions on daily basis so that tasks enable students to access learning in this heavily English language learner school. The teacher in a second grade used "pre-questions" to prepare students to understand the concepts of the lesson, and provided students with extensive charts of synonyms to develop language usage. This strategic planning, and the selection of relatable materials, enabled second grade language learners to recognize patterns of language as they read the book Let's Play Soccer during guided reading.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across all classrooms and all grades, teachers use and create common assessments that are well aligned to the school's curricula, track student mastery and routinely provide next steps for all students including English language learners, special needs students and gifted students, through curricular adjustments that are timely, and well targeted to meet student needs.

Impact

A broad range of assessments, including pre and post unit benchmarks, rubric driven appraisals of student work, peer conferencing and student self-evaluations has provided students with individualized next steps and teachers with the data needed to create ongoing, flexible small group instruction that was seen in every classroom visited.

Supporting Evidence

- The use of running records that result in Fountas and Pinnell Reading levels has been reflectively evaluated to ensure that there is accurate calibration across grades and classes. This effort has been well reinforced by teacher professional development and individualized coach support which ensures that teacher assessment of students, especially in the area of non-fiction literacy is both accurate and coherent school-wide. This same focus has also been applied to teacher conferencing coding. Teacher use of these tools is now seen as purposeful and diagnostic. As one fifth grade student astutely commented, "The teacher is always making notes."
- Student grouping was highly strategic and flexible. For example, self-selected strategy groups were seen in one class and skill groups in another, while English language learners (ELLs) worked with language supports and scaffolds in all classrooms as well. In addition, in a second grade class, the teacher using the story, Let's Play Soccer reviewed the words play, player, players, eliciting from students the impact of the letter "s" as she worked with her ELLs, while students in another group had been given "pre-questions" to target their reading during independent reading.
- The review of student work evidenced the expansive use of checklists, rubrics and teacher feedback and helped students to produce meaningful products such as a second grader's "Trip to Iceland" report of information and a third grader's "Hopes and Dreams" personal narrative that reflected her goals for the year based on her previous year's achievement. Students universally commented on the nature of teacher support that helped them to improve achievement. One 4th grade ELL student remarked that, "My teacher helped me by giving me the Window Strategy and the Foil Strategy in Math."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The newly appointed school leader consistently and continually communicates high expectations for professionalism, collaboration and communication, as well as instructional excellence by serving as a role model and inspiring her entire school community, including teachers, parents and students to grow as learners through targeted feedback, constant accessibility and a shared vision of student success.

Impact

As a result of the school's high levels of expectation and culture of trust and commitment, the largely immigrant school and English Language Learners of this school boast a ninety six percent rate of success as they complete their academic subjects in the sixth grade, bettering both the city and the district.

Supporting Evidence

- Skillfully utilizing the Danielson Framework to provide significant, targeted feedback, deepen teacher understanding of expectations through weekly newsletters, whole staff emails, one-to-one conferences and an open door policy that was praised by both parents and teachers alike, the principal has created a culture that is rich in collaboration, mutual support and embedded accountability. This culture is rooted in trust and embodies the school's high expectations. Rich professional development options through Teachers College and math partnerships, inter-visitations and coach support from the school leaders and coaches, and ongoing feedback enable teachers to grow their content and pedagogic practices and share them with colleagues during turnkey training. These learnings are then expected to be seen during formal and informal observations. For example, a teacher extremely well versed in the Common Core Learning Standards is working with colleagues in special education so that student Individualized Educational Plan goals are aligned to these rigorous expectations and yet still target student specific needs.
- The school is home to a daily adult education program that draws immigrant parents to the school and the importance of high expectations in parents as learners. Further, this incredibly large and diverse school, which is sited in two buildings, has developed meaningful partnerships with the school's Islamic, Asian and Hispanic communities, so that all constituencies feel respected and see that their traditions are honored. This has created an atmosphere of openness as has the use of translation at every meeting so that the school is able to effectively communicate academic and social expectations and embed college and career readiness. To quote several parents, "The principal is open and listens to parents," "These are quality teachers who care."
- The committed guidance counselor and parent coordinator provide individualized support to parents so that teacher feedback is understood and next steps clearly defined. This is especially clear as they help parents to navigate the complex world of middle school choice, scheduling open house appointments and helping each and every parent complete the application process so that their selections provide their children with strong educational options as they transition from fifth grade into middle school, well equipped with the academic skills needed for middle school success.