Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Langston Hughes School

Elementary School K233

9301 Avenue B
Brooklyn
NY 11236

Principal: Denean Stephens-Spellman

Date of review: March 17, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins

The School Context

Langston Hughes School is an elementary school with 529 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 95% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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
School leaders and teachers use common assessment data, to determine student progress, and to make effective instructional decisions. Teachers' assessment practices aligned to the curricula, across classrooms consistently reflect the use of rubrics, ongoing checks for understanding, and student self-assessment.

Impact
Data analysis systems are used regularly to guide effective adjustments to curricula and instructional units and lessons to meet students' learning needs. Teachers provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses common assessments in all content areas such as curriculum-embedded rubrics, i-Ready, school-wide assessments, and writing on demand, "Tracking Sheets", chapter assessments, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Progress Reports, and exit slips. These provide ongoing information on student performance and progress.

- Analysis of formative data determines supports for students in the school's lowest third population in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. These supports include providing forty-nine students attendance in the Saturday Academy Program. In addition, students in the "Rising Stars" afterschool program received five hours of additional instruction per week.

- Across the school, teachers are responding to trends in math. Adjustments to pacing calendars and changes in the sequence of units are among thoughtful decisions made to curricula based on assessment results. A teacher leader with a degree in the area of mathematics collaborates with teachers on curriculum to ensure students make gains.

- Teachers use ongoing checks for understanding namely, conference notes, rubrics, formative assessments, and exit slips to group students by needs, re-teaching, differentiate activities by tiers or groups, across grades and subjects. For example, a math lesson on comparing fractions listed group activities labeled as *most support, some support, or least support* based on data determining students' needs. Furthermore, teachers revise mini-lessons by implementing additional teacher demonstrations and modeling to meet students' needs. This latter adjustment to instruction was evidenced in a plan on author's purpose for a group of second grade students.

- Adjustments to instructional practices reflect actionable responses and student feedback to analysis of student learning outcomes. Unanimously, students reported that they receive rubrics and checklists to help with their work to assess peers' work, "to make sense of their [own] thinking, and to get help from classmates to do better on the task".

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Pedagogy, across classrooms, is aligned to the curricula and reflects the school's belief about how students learn best. While teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points, strategic opportunities for students to use high-quality supports and extensions varied across classrooms.

Impact
The Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts inform the school's instructional platform, yet there were missed opportunities that inhibited all learners from further engaging in challenging tasks and demonstrating higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal expressed the school-wide beliefs about how students learn best, stating that there is a combination of components supporting learning such as teacher demonstrations, application of learning in rigorous tasks, questions and discussions, and the use of common language . To that end, this year professional learning focuses on the strengthening of pedagogical capacity via the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* Domain 3-Instruction. Common teaching strategies aligned to curricula and driven by the *Framework for Teaching* include clear lesson objectives, front-loading academic vocabulary, incorporation of tiered and flexible grouping, and strategic use of instructional materials and resources.

- Most lessons observed were executed to promote higher-order thinking allowing students to demonstrate their capacity to complete appropriately challenging tasks. For example, a narrated video clip shown to fifth graders about the migration of African Americans, post-slavery, supported small group discussions that helped students to analyze characters' words and actions, which led to students making thoughtful connections about the disposition of historic fictional characters, as they discussed dialogue and tone. Conversely, during a math lesson in a second grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classroom, students worked within a parallel teaching model, to subtract using the regrouping strategy. One co-teacher worked with a small group of students, while the other co-teacher worked with students in the larger group sharing their explanations of a Higher Order Thinking (H.O.T.) expression embedded in the Go Math! lesson. However, the lesson for both groups was predominantly teacher-directed, thus limiting opportunities for students to construct knowledge through productive struggle, formulate their own questions, and reflect on the efficiency of models presented.

- Students across grades reported their teachers use different tools like the SMARTboard and audio.com as they read along with iPads. Although students stated that they now work in groups and use books on tapes to help improve their reading, there was a lack of strategically placed high-quality supports and extensions provided during classroom visits. In a kindergarten classroom, where students read independently, the learning objective was to use details to find the main idea. Three students shared the title of their book and a picture they had drawn, but made no connections between the retell, illustration, and main idea of stories shared. The lack of prompting and support hindered students' demonstration of higher-order thinking and meaningful work products.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
All curricula align to Common Core Learning Standards and reflect the integration of instructional shifts. Academic tasks and lessons are adjusted based on analysis of student work and data.

Impact
The school's coherent curriculum emphasizes high-level cognitive engagement, access across grades, and promotes college and career readiness for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- This school year, school leaders and teachers engaged in curriculum development using an analysis of student performance data from the previous year as well as adjusting for students needs based on real-time data. ReadyGen and Go Math! units of study were adjusted to incorporate ample time for guided and independent reading across grades. Refinement of tasks included the extending of units and implementation of lessons over a two-day period in lieu of the recommended one day of instruction with adjustments based on students' needs. In early grade lessons, teachers create opportunities for students to have additional time to engage with listening comprehension tasks and work in centers to build literacy skills. In upper grades, tasks aligned to Common Core Learning Standards in math include front-loaded lessons on number and operation strands to ensure learning targets that require prerequisite skills for high-level learning are met by diverse groups of learners.

- Curriculum maps provide evidence that the staff develops cognitively engaging tasks aligned to the Common Core and instructional shifts through the adaptation and refinement of instructional resources and materials. Unit plans across grades and content areas, include technology aids, professional videos, digital resources, supports for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), and excursions related to the unit of study that fosters real-world applications.

- All teachers plan lessons using a common format to build coherence in prompting cognitive development toward college and career readiness. Lesson plans reviewed incorporated three types of questions. For instance, questions to promote higher-order thinking, to promote discussion, and to assess understanding. This practice was heard in a third grade classroom. During the course of the lesson, students were asked, "What is your understanding?", "What have you learned from this activity?", and "What model did you choose, why?"

- The integration of science and social studies content-based units of study into English language arts curricula engenders instructional coherence. The school implements the New York City Department of Education Social Studies Scope and Sequence content standards into reading and writing performance tasks. Infographic work products displayed on bulletin boards school-wide reflect the fusing of reading informational, writing, science-based concepts, and the arts into cognitively engaging tasks that provide access to curricula for diverse groups of students.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
High expectations connected to professional and instructional goals, as aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, are consistently communicated to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations to students.

Impact
Structures, that provide training and foster the existing culture of accountability, support the school's high expectations for teaching. Ongoing and detailed feedback provides support toward next level preparedness and learning amongst students.

Supporting Evidence

- During Individual Professional Conferences (IPCs) held at the beginning of the school year, school leaders and faculty engage in reciprocal dialogue around professional goals, instructional goals, and expectations for teaching and learning. Annual Professional Performance Review Ratings, individual and composite ratings, a crosswalk between elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, the School Comprehensive Educational Plan goals, and school-wide performance data serve as the core for communicating expectations about teaching practices. In addition to communicated high-expectations from school leaders, teams of teachers set goals for pedagogical expectations that strengthen their practice. For example, teachers adopted graphic organizers for accelerated learners, determined adjustments to ReadyGen curricula, and used protocols to examine student work. Teachers reported that all adults invest in all students and that they hold themselves, and each other, accountable for building a school community of uniformity and high expectations. School leaders hold faculty accountable via frequent cycles of observations and actionable time-bound professional feedback.

- The 2013-2014 Quality School Snapshot indicates the school received a rating of three bars (good) for how clearly high expectations are communicated to students and staff. Ninety-five percent of the school's former fifth graders pass sixth grade core subjects, surpassing city and district averages. Student performance in their first year of middle school demonstrates their being prepared for the next level.

- Consistently communicated high expectations are evident in several school-wide practices. Staff consistently implements the practice of using rubric-based language to provide clear next step feedback to students. This was evident in a review of student work displayed inside and outside of classrooms, in work folders, and on written work in notebooks. Similarly, the staff and administration ensures mainstreaming of students for English language arts and math instruction.

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

Findings
Teachers are engaged in structured professional inquiry collaborations. Distributed leadership structures support, develop, and foster teacher leadership roles.

Impact
The work of teacher teams results in improved pedagogy and strengthened teacher capacity. Shared leadership structures give rise to teacher voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade leaders, selected by colleagues, share responsibility for facilitation of professional learning powered by content ambassadors who attend trainings offered by the network. Response to Intervention trainings instigated the turnkey to grade teams of Universal Design for Learning strategies, which lead to the retooling of Tier 2 support for students. The Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) provider pushes into classrooms to work with students, thus, also supporting colleagues.

- Subsequent to analysis of school-wide math performance data, teachers determined that in order to improve their students' math achievement, professional learning opportunities would focus on content-based teaching of math. A teacher serves as a math ambassador and turnkeys training sessions. Teachers participated in a three-week course on teaching fractions as well as training on how to maximize resources in their implementation of the Go Math! program.

- Teachers articulated that they felt empowered to have input on decisions toward the development of instructional resources across grades such as selecting Go Math! as the recommended math program. The formation of a vertical team to build a collegial community and a positive culture for learning is also teacher-led.

- Teachers engage in collaborative visits and debrief to discuss strategies described as "take aways" as to how to leverage best practices. Teachers improve their instructional capacity by implementing learned strategies. Teachers stated that the sharing of strategies to improve student writing include *UACE* (*Understand, Answe*r questions, *Cite* evidence, *Explain*) and *CUPS (Capitalization, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling*), which elevate explicit teaching and student work products. "Writing has improved tremendously," shared the third grade team.