



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Arthur W. Cunningham

Intermediate School K234

**1875 East 17 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11229**

Principal: Susan Schaeffer

**Date of review: March 25, 2015
Lead Reviewers: Julia Bove**

The School Context

Arthur W. Cunningham is an intermediate school with 1,923 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 17% Black, 12% Hispanic, 44% White, 25% Asian, and 2% other students. The student body includes 9% 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 96.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	Proficient
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

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

Teacher teams engage in structured professional collaborations using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning.

Impact

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher capacity resulting in increased achievement for all learners. Teacher teams systematically analyze classroom practice, assessment data, and student work resulting in shared improvements of teacher practice and mastery of goals for students.

Supporting Evidence

- An English language arts teacher team was analyzing student work. They shared minutes from the last meeting that had been printed out and emailed prior to this meeting. The team followed the protocol for looking at student work and centered the discussion around the framing question, "What additional support can we give before students publish their final essay?" They took low inference notes and shared their findings. One teacher stated, "The students can identify similarities and differences. I do not see that they are focusing on evidence from the text." The team's next step was to share their findings with other departments.
- The school has a vertical teacher team in mathematics. Two teachers for each grade (6-8) chose a focus based on materials they were using and what they noticed was not included. They used common planning time to adjust the curriculum and revisit their decisions based on student work. Team members stated that they were given flexibility in planning inquiry work.
- To address the needs of the lowest third of students, teachers identified students based on last year's state exam and school administered benchmarks. They then examined student work and assessed what interventions would be needed. Interventions included explanations, checklists, graphic organizers, and rephrasing of questions. Additionally, teachers stated that they use strategies learned during Monday professional development sessions. The English language arts department created scaffolds that they then shared with the social studies department resulting in improved student writing in that content area.
- Teacher teams play an active role in professional learning. Through Peer Instructional Coaches and with the supervision of administration, teachers are trained in how to provide quality professional development. Once a month the school hosts a Faculty Expertise Day. Teachers present workshops to various departments. The goal is to help shape adult learning by examining student need.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school aligns assessments to curricula and analyzes information on student learning to adjust instructional decisions.

Impact

Because student data is used to modify curriculum and assessments, students are provided with actionable feedback that includes next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a variety of assessments including questioning, exit slips, peer and self-assessment, and quick check summaries. The school also uses summative assessments which include regularly administered benchmark exams. The results of these are used to modify instruction. For example, a Grade 7 mathematics assessment revealed that students struggled with polygons and 3 dimensional solids. Lesson plans were revised to include reteach activities for these deficits.
- A member of the teacher team shared an example of student work that was a result of a formative assessment she made in the moment. During a Code X lesson, she realized that the graphic organizer the children were using was not basic enough for the task. She created a different graphic organizer and after students were successful with that organizer, they were able to go back and successfully complete the original one from the Code X program.
- Students stated that they have rubrics for all subjects. They used these rubrics to guide them toward how to improve their work. One student stated, "All the teachers use them with us." Rubrics were present across classrooms.
- In a sixth grade class, students were looking at text for words in context that depicted tone. Students were using rubrics and the text contained bracketed prompts for difficult words to provide a scaffold for former English language learners. This allowed students to complete the task without sacrificing reading fluency.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school ensures that engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, and accessible to all learners in all subjects.

Impact

Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data. This results in a diversity of learners having access to cognitively engaging tasks. Rigorous habits are coherently embedded with the expectation that all students demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses the Code X program which focuses on vocabulary, comprehension, writing and performance tasks as it engages students in Close Reading and daily writing activities. The school has made modifications to the program based on need. For example, they removed some pieces of the program and added additional tiered texts. They also substituted and changed the order of some novels based on student reading levels, teacher input, and student interest. Students performing below grade level follow the program with the support of individual accommodations, while students in the advanced classes are using the practices of Code X as they read classical literature, such as Romeo & Juliet and Othello
- For mathematics, school leaders and mathematics teachers created curriculum maps based on the Common Core Learning Standards. The teachers designed tasks based on Glencoe Math and GoMath! and included additional scaffolding supports for the Regents class based on GoMath! augmented by an Algebra I text. There are beginning, middle, and end-of-year benchmarks to officially assess student performance and progress. Teachers look at student work daily and adjust instruction based on trends.
- In science, the school has eliminated the use of textbooks and uses FOSS exploratory kits instead. This decision was based on student need to have science be more experiential in preparation for state exams. The school has tailored the content and sequencing to support students. For example, the unit on weather was switched to the spring so that all students could have real time outdoor experience. Also, the grade six curriculum was switched to strict physical science. This is integrated with mathematics and prepares students to take the Earth Science Regents exam in eighth grade
- In social studies, the school informs its planning based on the new scope and sequence. They use an approach of claim and counter claim that is embedded in tasks. Students are required to explore how historical events relate to them now. They must then justify and defend their opinions and prepare a culminating essay.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teacher pedagogy is developed from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn and meets the needs of all learners.

Impact

Across classrooms, observed teaching practices aligned to curricula. Student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- In a sixth grade social studies class, students were working in groups to answer the question: “Which city state will have the claim to fame: Athens or Sparta?” The teacher modeled how to cite evidence from the text. She stated a reason for Athens and then proceeded to think out loud as she highlighted details in the text displayed on a smart board. Students were to repeat this process by looking at four documents, pretending to be lawyers, and choosing whom to defend (Athens or Sparta); they then had to make the case for their client. In deciding not to choose Sparta, one student stated, “If you have little contact with the outside world, you have no allies. I do not think I should defend Sparta.”
- In a sixth grade math class, displayed student work showed evidence of collaborative problem solving. Peer feedback showed that each child contributed a strategy. Students also noticed common mistakes that the group made: “I noticed from the vocabulary that we confused area and perimeter.”
- In an eighth grade English class, students were discussing Shakespearean sonnets and close reading text for imagery and form. One girl used context clues to derive the meaning of “summer all girded up in sheaves.” Another made a text-to-text connection between her sonnet and Romeo and Juliet: “In the sonnet, he [Shakespeare] is saying everything on earth is limited. It’s like when Juliet limited her own life.”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school has established a culture for learning that regularly communicates high expectations as per the Danielson Framework for Teaching to staff, students, and families, and provides supports to achieve those expectations.

Impact

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the staff, resulting in a culture of mutual accountability. The culture of learning consistently communicates high expectations for all students and provides clear, focused and effective feedback.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate through weekly and monthly newsletters, and via the school's website. Website content is updated daily through Engrade. Teachers have individual pages. Parents stated that they find this an efficient and helpful way to participate in the success of their children.
- School leader provide ongoing training for the staff through peer instructional coaches, demonstration teachers, and veteran faculty. Teachers also have common planning time and engage in intervisitations to observe and share best practices.
- The school has its own Gmail account. Every teacher, family, and student has access to this. Teachers upload information that is transparent to the entire community. The school also videotapes Tuesday afternoon sessions for parents who cannot come to school during that time. Videos are accessible to the parents via the school website.
- Teacher observation reports include extensive comments with regard to growing and developing professionally as per Indicator 4e of the Danielson Framework for teaching. Teachers are commended for pursuing professional development opportunities and are encouraged to continue holding themselves and their students to high standards. For example, one teacher observation provided the following feedback: "I have seen growth in...differentiated instruction. As a next step, I recommend that you push student led learning further."