



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Philip Livingston

Elementary School K261

**314 Pacific Street
Brooklyn
NY 11201**

Principal: Zipporah Mills

**Date of review: April 1, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Anita Skop**

The School Context

P.S. 261 Philip Livingston is an elementary school with 808 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 28% Black, 23% Hispanic, 39% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.0%.

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	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	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
---------------------------	---	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core (including the instructional shifts). Teacher teams systematically analyze assessment data and student work for students in their grade level and subject areas.

Impact

The teacher collaboration in implementing the Common Core has strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers. This has resulted in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly using norms and defined roles to guide their analysis of student work and curricular decisions. Teachers capture “noticings” using protocols that ensure that students’ strengths and areas of need are surfaced objectively. This practice has created greater consistency of language and increased agency among teachers. Particularly, this occurred during a teacher team meeting observed where student math work was closely examined. Three samples of the same problem were shared. Teachers wrote their noticings on the student work for ten minutes. The noticings were completely objective. In the classroom, this was evidenced by a student saying “I got it” when figuring out how to divide fractions, demonstrating deep thinking by math students. Additionally, student work was scaffolded with a challenge/extension problem for stronger kids.
- Analysis of review of student work informs teachers of which standards have been mastered and which standards require revisiting using revised instructional approaches, such as debates and comic strips to answer in class questions such as, “How do we know operations?” in math. Consistent team meetings and sharing of strategies have resulted in a shared perspective of curricular and instructional practices needed to address student learning needs. The principal demonstrated strongly aligned inquiry practices exhibiting a greater clarity of vision, more communication, greater coherence, and increased agency among teachers. Thus, pacing calendars reflect greater cohesion and are more developmentally appropriate across grades and subjects.
- The school has an expectation that teachers can speak to data as a source of student supports and groupings, also using social-emotional data to play a part of grouping strategy when designing lessons and activities. During professional development time, the staff development team is highly immersed in inquiry-based learning through their own reflections on student work. There is purposeful planning and learning around designing student-centered activities based on looking at student work. For example, during inquiry work, teachers have a protocol where they looked at three math samples of the same problem and wrote objective noticing for ten minutes. After that, they used the information to design activities such as using debates or comics in order for students to answer the question, “How do we know operations?” while working in small, targeted groups.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Therefore, student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

All learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has developed a clearly defined set of beliefs as to what students need in order to learn. Classrooms routinely provide an environment where the teachers have established a respectful rapport with students with a focus on study group, social and emotional supports for students, settings where learning is social, and small group instruction where needed. Teachers have modeled direct instruction to start the lesson, but then listen in to small groups to observe social aspects through conferencing. Teachers intervene with students who are struggling and meet with parents.
- Students participate in classrooms where they are asked a mix of questions focusing on open-ended questions in alignment with the Common Core and the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Professional development has been conducted around questioning and discussion techniques throughout the entire school year. Students take ownership of their own learning. True to their mission statement, students must engage in inquiry-based learning and think for themselves. Students participate in ongoing group discussions and reflect upon their reading and writing in a low-risk environment. Teachers use the constructivist approach to structure their lessons to support inquiry-based learning. To promote writing and reading, teachers use immersion into the genre as a strategy.
- Students take ownership of their group discussions and reflect upon what went well. In one classroom, students in partnerships comment on each other's comments. For example, they talk about making fun of other people because of their religion or culture. In classrooms, questions were generated by teachers rather than by both teachers and students. Teachers asked questions such as "Raise thumb if you can describe your noticings about a poem..." "How many of you found some poems that had some big strong emotion?" In another classroom, the teacher asks "What do you need to make a pack of tens?" and "Who can tell us what we are going to do?" showing that the ownership has not yet fully shifted from the teacher to students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Aligning the curricula to the Common Core and content standards has resulted in coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students. All learners, including the lowest- and highest-achieving students, English language learners and students with disabilities, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Over the last year, the school has made a conscious decision to establish vertical teams that address the key curricular areas of focus in the school: reading, writing, and math. The focus of the vertical teams on essential curricula has resulted in coherent alignment of key concepts and skills and adjusted pacing across grades. For example, after review of the reading curriculum map, lead teachers of reading decided to bring back “How To...” books and moved “All about...” books to later in the year. In an effort to deepen the reading focus for next year, decisions were made to work with key authors, such as Dorothy Barnhouse and Isoke Nia, in book clubs to build students’ metacognitive skills.
- Refinement of curricular maps and review of instructional practices ensure that the needs of subgroups of students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, are met. Integrated Co-Teaching classes are made up of strong teachers who are very skilled in using English as a Second Language strategies to work with struggling learners. Full- and part-time English as a Second Language teachers work with beginners and lower grades students to build strong language foundations. Title III funds are strategically used for targeted after-school programs, and pre-teaching are strategies are viewed as instructional non-negotiables. These practices and decisions provide consistent and effective language support for all second language learners that ensure access to curricula and tasks.
- Ongoing practice of curriculum adjustment and instructional alignments, accordingly, has resulted in increased outcomes from all groups of students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. For instance, in an ICT classroom, more talkative students support silent students to access the curriculum, while other students use vocabulary with pictures. In another classroom, a teacher uses realia for students to count in tens to learn packs of ten so that in all cases, more students can cognitively engage with the material. Empowered teacher leaders have viewed deepening their Universal Design for Learning work as a goal for next year.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

The nine-week cycles of student work inquiry provides actionable feedback to teachers regarding student achievement and teachers then provide actionable feedback to check student understanding regarding what is expected of their learning. Common assessment results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s use of data to determine student progress and develop goals starts from the first staff meeting of the school year. Team and whole staff meetings focus on the analysis of student performance by standards surfaced gaps in students’ ability to respond to short and extended response questions. This led to professional development focused on strengthening practices used to teach short and extended responses. This focus on analyzing common shared data such as Fountas and Pinnell, rubric levels and performance-based tasks lead to the targeted identification of students in need of interventions.
- Nine-week cycles of study of student work using common assessments surfaced instructional gaps and learning gaps. English Language Arts and math item skills analysis along with rubric results, Fountas and Pinnell reading levels and teacher data are used to develop inquiry questions that are explored over four weeks. These surfaced gaps in student learning and teacher practice solidified the connection between teaching and learning that drives the professional development work in the school.
- Pre-unit, mid-unit and post-unit assessments are regularly aligned to each unit of study. These assessment results are used to determine what students know and are able to do. Gaps in learning are discussed at grade meetings and strategies to address these areas are determined. Review of what needs to be modified are explored during professional learning meetings. Revisions to curriculum and teaching practices are made based on these analyses.
- Students were able to self-assess in classrooms based on teacher-created assessments, and teachers were able to check for understanding throughout instruction. For instance, in one classroom, students were working in small groups on drawing the “big idea” and textual evidence. Students would underline text and then enter evidence in the chart. When one student recognized that her evidence was different, she said “We don’t have the exact same idea. It is similar.” The teacher who was circulating responded by saying “What do you mean by similar?” and then asked the group “Do you all agree?” One student responded “Yes, because this is how he figures out who to give the shoes to...” and another student responded “I can feel him wishing those shoes were his.”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations to families that are connected to a path to college and career readiness. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students and offer ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance/advisement supports.

Impact

The school successfully partners with parents to support student progress towards high expectations for student success and prepare students for the next level, particularly through their enrichment programs.

Supporting Evidence

- School expectations are clearly articulated for all individuals, groups of students, and staff members, and are evident in all aspects of the school community. The school’s mission statement focuses on developing students as members of a writing community, “...by developing committed citizens of the world, who are intellectually confident, artistically expressive and socially sensitive.” There is a focus on independent skills and exposure to different genres to ensure that students, “develop a lifelong love of learning in a nurturing, safe, collaborative and enriched educational environment.” The expectation in every classroom is that there is closure and reflection at the end of each lesson and students complete self-reflections generated from rubric-based comments and checklists.
- Teacher expectations for classroom learning support students and are also clearly communicated to parents. Students are required to prove arguments using textual evidence to support their claims. Additionally, the Parent Art Committee is a partnership that connects students and teachers to the arts, bringing programs into the school on every grade level. Art is a part of every curriculum, with a bridge study partnership with local museums and assembly programs. Through a partnership with Carnegie Hall, grade 3 is learning to play the recorder, grade 4 is learning to sing opera and to play band instruments, and grade 5 is learning to play the guitar. The organizational structure of the school supports this vision with two cluster art positions, a lower grade vocal teacher, and an upper grade instrumental music teacher.
- Teachers and school staff have a strong relationship with parents. For example, P.S. 261 hosts middle school nights starting in June for grade 4 parents. Structures have been put in place to help parents complete the forms. Additional outreach to parents is done in several languages in order to reach all members of the community. Students develop ownership of their learning. They are comfortable explaining their projects, work, strengths, and areas of growth in discussions with other students or with adults. For example, grade 5 students designed a social action project on childhood obesity, drunk driving, or police community relations. They chose the social issue for their project, developed a plan of action including videoing a public service announcement commercial, conducting interviews and research, and presented their findings.