



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**I.S. 281 Joseph B Cavallaro**

**Middle School K281**

**8787 24th Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11214**

**Principal: Maria Bender**

**Date of review: December 11, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Isabel DiMola**

## The School Context

Joseph B. Cavallaro is a middle school with 1,158 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population is comprised of 7% Black, 24% Hispanic, 32% White and 37% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 11% 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 93.7%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

All teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations that strengthen instructional capacity, promote implementation of the Common Core learning standards (CCLS), and embed processes that allow teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practice.

### Impact

The work produced by the teacher teams has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence, improved teacher practice, increased achievement for all learners and distributed leadership structures that affect learning throughout the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Inquiry teams across grades and content areas disaggregate data from multiple sources, including Achieve 3000, IXL math assessment, MOSL assessments, NYSLESLAT, pre and post unit assessments, quarterly exams and student work to understand trends across grades and content areas. Planning documents, such as unit plans, lesson plans, team minutes and Individualized Education Plans (IEP), show changes that align to data. For example, after evaluating student data from a pre-unit assessment, teachers planned a lesson using a station model of instruction to allow students to focus on pre-requisite skills in the areas of vocabulary, similes, comparing and contrasting, mood and comprehension to ensure they were ready to move forward in the next unit of study.
- Teachers collaboratively plan and design curriculum maps, units of study, and lesson plans that reflect alignment to CCLS and the instructional shifts in all subject areas and grades. Unit plans show evidence of challenging tasks that promote critical thinking skills and allow for demonstration of learning using text based evidence. Student outcomes are increasing with most students moving at least one rubric level on performance assessments in writing.
- The school participates in the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program that supports teacher leadership. Two teachers serve as peer instructional coaches and five teachers serve as demonstration teachers. The peer instructional coaches sit on the lead teacher team with administrators as well as develop and implement professional development to their peers. Demonstration teachers open their classrooms to colleagues and model instructional strategies and effective teaching practices. Teachers explain that “they feel supported, are listened to and enjoy the many opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.”
- Teacher teams examine curricula maps in relation to the CCLS and student outcomes and make suggestions to administration for change if necessary. For example, English language arts teachers demonstrated that the program they were using did not provide students with access to novels that allowed for deep analysis of text. Teachers revised the units of study by incorporating novels as anchor texts with the resources from Codex as a supplement to support student learning.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

While some teachers use formative assessments and student self-assessment to provide on-going checks for understanding, the school as a whole is developing the use of common assessments to understand school-wide trends and measure progress across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

The use of common and formative assessment data informs adjustments to unit and lesson planning at an individual class level. However, as the data is not being consistently and deeply analyzed at a school-wide level, the school misses opportunities to uncover vertical trends and gaps in standard alignment necessary to make adjustments to affect school-wide practice.

### Supporting Evidence

- The use of common assessments, such as pre and post assessments in content areas and subject quarterly exams, provides teachers with data that is used to adjust unit and lesson planning. However, the data is not consistently disaggregated and analyzed in order to present a clear picture of student progress, individually, by class and sub-group. This limits its value in terms of providing the information necessary to effectively adjust and plan lessons that meet the needs of all students.
- Administrators collect the results of common assessments and review the data holistically to get an over-arching view of school progress across grades and subject areas. For example, administrators articulate the passing percentages for classes on quarterly exams. However, they have not yet done an item analysis that would allow for identification of specific trends of student achievement. Therefore, there is limited information to evaluate curricula and impact of teaching on student performance.
- In some classes, it is evident that teachers use exit slips, formative assessment, and student checklists to assess student work and make adjustments throughout lessons. For example, some adjustments observed include changes in grouping, student selection for guided groups, and use of various graphic organizers that include Venn diagrams and T-Charts. However, the use of on-going checks for understanding is inconsistent and therefore it is not always evident that teachers are making effective adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

All curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with higher order skills consistently being emphasized for all learners across grades and content areas.

### Impact

The school's curricula builds coherence, promotes college and career readiness for all students, and incorporate academic tasks that provide students with opportunities to demonstrate higher order thinking skills.

### Supporting Evidence

- Units of study across content areas integrate the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Planned activities require students to engage in multi-step problem solving, argumentative writing, text-based response and content specific vocabulary. For example, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science unit on the different systems of the body presented the student with a case study of a woman being able to lift a car inches off the ground to help release her son who was trapped. Students were charged with explaining the role the endocrine system may have had in the woman's show of strength.
- Unit plans and lessons in all content areas incorporate academic tasks with multiple access points and scaffolds to meet the needs of all learners. For example, English language arts and science planning documents included the use of visual aids, tiered vocabulary, a variety of graphic organizers, sentence strips and leveled text to provide access to all students.
- Units of study across all content are building coherence in developing how tasks are being planned to allow students demonstrate learning. For example, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade unit of study on equations and expressions had students answer essential questions to demonstrate their understanding of the mathematical concepts, including "when do equations have no solution in infinitely many solutions?" Tasks required that students create equations that match no solution and infinitely many solutions, write a response, and share the response in group or to the class, developing their skills to communicate ideas.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

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### **Impact**

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### **Supporting Evidence**

- Units of study across content areas integrate the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Planned activities require students to engage in multi-step problem solving, argumentative writing, text-based response and content specific vocabulary. For example, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science unit on the different systems of the body presented the student with a case study of a woman being able to lift a car inches off the ground to help release her son who was trapped. Students were charged with explaining the role the endocrine system may have had in the woman's show of strength.
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<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

High expectations are communicated to the entire school community, including teachers, students, and families. Professional development, parent workshops, and teacher feedback place students on a path of college and career readiness.

### **Impact**

Structures that support high expectations across all constituencies establish a culture of mutual accountability in school-family partnerships that support students' achievement of college and career ready skills and behaviors as well as among teachers for meeting school expectations around teaching and learning.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Articulation of high expectations as stated by school leadership and faculty includes an understanding that the Danielson Framework for Teaching is at the core of teacher practice. Through faculty conferences, individual planning conferences, grade and department meetings and professional development, teachers are immersed in the Danielson framework. Through conversations with teachers, it is evident that there is an understanding that they are to plan units and lessons that provide all students with opportunities to access content and demonstrate their learning through multiple pathways. They refer to the Danielson rubric, report that supervisors support their understanding of expectations, and provide meaningful feedback so they can improve their practice.
- Parent engagement activities build family capacity to participate in their children's education. During September's parent night, the school held a meet and greet that provided parents with an opportunity to receive an overview of the expectations for the 2014-15 school year. Each family had the opportunity to meet with their child's teachers to hear about the goals for each class and to learn concrete strategies to support their children's learning throughout the year. Parents shared that the evening was "very beneficial" and helped them understand what the kids need to do and how to help them.
- Regular communication with parents includes a school website, Skedula, which is an online system that parents can access, progress reports, phone calls, emails and report cards. This provides parents with a clear understanding of expectations and student progress.
- Workshops for parents build an understanding of college and career readiness skills the school stresses to support student growth. As shared by students, teachers and parents, there is an expectation that students demonstrate personal behaviors conducive to success, including respect, perseverance, determination, honesty and integrity.