



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Liberty Avenue School

Middle School K662

**350 Linwood Street
Brooklyn
NY 11208**

Principal: Kaia Nordtvedt

**Date of review: April 29, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Brenda Perez**

The School Context

Liberty Avenue School is a middle school with 292 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 25% Black, 66% Hispanic, 2% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.9%.

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	Celebration	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	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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and offers students a coherent and rigorous instructional program that integrates the instructional shifts. Utilizing data, the school refines curricula and tasks to ensure access for all students to engaging and meaningful learning experiences.

Impact

All students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, engage in rigorous Common Core aligned tasks that provide a range of learning experiences across all disciplines that promote critical thinking skills and improve student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- The school offers a standard-based curriculum aligned to the Common Core. Codex has been implemented in literacy, Go Math in math, and Glencore in science. Programs are supplemented using resources from Engage NY, the National State Standards and personnel specialists. These specialists co-teach and meet with grade teams to ensure that curriculum maps include appropriate scaffolds to maximize student learning. For example, the reading specialist meets with the humanities, English as a second language, and students with disabilities teachers once a week to discuss and analyze the results provided via formative assessments and students' work products to collaboratively plan lessons and make adjustments to curriculum maps and unit plans as needed.
- Across grades and disciplines, curriculum and unit plans demonstrate standards, learning objectives in "I can" student friendly language, Universal Design for Learning suggestions for students with disabilities, language goals and accommodation for ELLs, enrichment suggestions for Gifted and Talented (G&T), resources, rubrics and pacing of lessons. In classes observed, students were purposefully grouped to ensure access to cognitively engaging tasks designed to deepen students' understanding and learning. For example, in a humanities and math class, ELL students received copies of the text/task, the rubric and scaffolds in English and Spanish to ensure that all students had access to the curriculum.
- School leaders meet weekly with teachers to discuss individual and class data analysis. Utilizing a school designed template, school leaders and teachers collaboratively create an action plan to address identified trends. School leaders and teachers discuss how the teacher plans to address the focus area, group and provide supports for low, middle, and high level students and changes are made to curriculum unit plans and lesson plans.
- The school uses Dropbox system used by all staff members to share information on instruction, support the content work and make revisions to the school's curriculum maps, unit plans, tasks, graphic organizers and/or rubrics. The principal stated that teachers use the system as a venue to collaborate about the work they are doing when they are not in school. Teachers will reach out to colleagues of different content areas to support school goals. For example, math and science teachers will incorporate writing, discussions, citing of evidence to support units in the humanities department.

Area of Focus

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

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

Impact

Professional collaboration contributes to school-wide coherence and enhances the instructional capacity of teachers, thereby strengthening classroom practices and improving student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly to review and revise lesson plans and look at student's work to determine strengths and areas for improvement. Teachers address the rigor in tasks, always keeping in mind the standards and multiple entry points to ensure access to the task and curricula for all students. In a teacher team meeting observed, teachers reviewed students' literacy responses and discussed different strategies to help students who were having difficulties gain a better understanding of the central idea in the story. Teachers discussed trends, theme, and different entry points to enable students to connect the central idea to the unit's essential question. At the end of the meeting, teachers agreed to try the strategies suggested and to bring samples of student work to the next team meeting.
- Teacher teams follow a protocol to examine student work and share information and revisions on Dropbox, an online file sharing system. Strategies, graphic organizers, checklist and rubrics are posted by team members after adjustments and revisions are made, allowing teachers to share the work with staff members and school leaders. The principal stated that the system provides administration with the opportunity to monitor, track, and provide feedback to the work of the teacher teams when they are unable to sit in on the meetings.
- Teachers reported that school leaders provide them with opportunities to engage in professional collaboration during scheduled common planning periods and during after school professional learning sessions and activities. Teachers work together to analyze data, create lesson plans and tasks. Teachers also reported that they use rubrics such as, Hess' Depth of Knowledge to plan and scaffold activities and questions across levels based on students' abilities. The principal stated that they are currently working on revising a unit plan on what teachers anticipate will be areas that need additional support based on the results of the last unit.
- Teachers stated that teacher team meetings by grade and/or department help them to plan explicit instruction to meet the needs of their students. A veteran teacher new to the school stated that the school leaders and specialists are available to work with them, collaboratively design differentiated tasks and guided-reading packets to support their classes. She stated that she enjoys this collaboration and feels a sense of community as "we are all in this together!"

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Instructional practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the school's beliefs about how students learn best. However, strategic entry points into the curricula and high quality supports and extensions for students varied across subject areas.

Impact

Some lessons did not fully demonstrate strategic multiple entry points to ensure all learners engaged in appropriately challenging academic tasks that further promote higher-order thinking skills and ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Many classroom visits reflected instructional strategies such as student grouping and varied levels of questioning. However, adequate supports to promote high level thinking to meet the needs of high achieving students, ELLs, and students with disabilities, varied resulting in limited opportunities to maximize student learning. For example, in a 7th grade history class, students were grouped under three levels and the tasks to the students were tiered. However, the assignment provided to students appear to be quantitative rather than challenging students to demonstrate high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.
- Across classrooms, students engaged with teachers and/or paraprofessionals in small groups. Teachers used visuals and strategies such as, conversation prompts, charts and "turn and talk" to promote student engagement and participation. In an Integrated Co-Teaching science class, students had to determine if pictures on the SMARTboard represented an example of the digestive system or the excretory system. Working in groups, students were given an envelope with three scenarios and a worksheet based on the students' reading level. Students had to pretend that they were a doctor and diagnose the patient according to the scenario, and describe and explain the diagnosis to the patient. One teacher worked closely with a group while the other teacher circulated among the other groups checking for understanding.
- Classroom observations revealed that some teachers used Spanish texts as a scaffold to meet the needs of students in their classes. For example, ELL students are provided with both English and Spanish texts and graphic organizers to ensure access to the curriculum.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the school, teachers use common assessments, rubric checklists, and grading policies to make strategic decisions, adjust curricula and lessons so that all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery towards meeting their goals.

Impact

The school's common assessments, tasks, rubrics, and checklists allow consistent progress monitoring of all students and facilitates adjustments to curricula and instruction to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school utilizes Achievement Net (ANet), a data system used to track student data. ANet designs common interim assessments that mirror the Common Core state exams. The school administers the benchmark assessments four times a year and current interim results in ELA shows a school-wide decrease of level 1 by 16% and an increase of level 4 by 5%. In math, school-wide results show a decrease of level 1 by 12% and an increase of level 4 by 5%. School leaders and teachers use the results of the exams to collaboratively plan instruction, adjust curricula, and make effective decisions to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Formative assessments and tasks align to the Common Core Learning Standards, curriculum unit plans and concepts students need to achieve. Teachers use conference notes as another way to gather information to guide student learning. Teachers also maintain data binders with weekly data that is collected in order to monitor and track student progress. Teachers meet with their colleagues to revise lessons to reteach concepts and/or plan for small group instruction. The principal stated that because teachers influence student learning, they need to assess frequently through formative assessments to ensure that students are learning. The data collected is reviewed with school leaders once a week and the principal stated that teachers have become effective in analyzing the data and knowing what to do with the data.
- Across the school, students work displays provided evidence of clear structures and expectations of how students work is celebrated. Students utilized rubrics, peer review checklists and self-reflections to monitor their strengths and area of growth. Students reported that rubrics are front loaded and that they work on their writing pieces several times because writing is a process and they often make revisions after conferences with their teachers. Students stated that teachers provided them with the opportunities to work with their peers and self-reflect. A student shared a writing piece that he was most proud of and stated that after each conference with his teacher, he was able to make it better and knows how he can make his next writing piece better.
- Utilizing data results, teachers identified small groups of students for additional instruction during academic intervention scheduled periods. School leaders strategically create teacher programs to provide students with an additional ELA class or facilitate fluid cycles of academic intervention services to meet the needs of students. Small groups of ELL students were observed reading the Little Prince. Students had the text, questions, and graphic organizer in both English and Spanish to ensure understanding and access to the curricula.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for professional collaboration, student learning, and family supports that exemplify a culture of mutual accountability and foster a community of learners to prepare all students for college and career readiness.

Impact

Across the school community, clear communication of the Common Core expectations and transparency around accountability systems allow all school constituents to collaboratively understand and deepen the work to support and improve student outcomes and ensure that students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader communicates high expectations during daily teacher morning meets, weekly horizontal and vertical team meetings and with weekly individual teacher meetings. During individual teacher meetings, school leaders look at class and individual student data and teachers the opportunity to self-reflect and discuss their progress towards meeting their goals. Teachers are held accountable through observations using Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. Learning opportunities are provided to meet teachers’ needs via Advance data, student data and work product samples, modeling and coaching by school leaders, content specialists, scheduled intervisitations and network support. This has established a culture of trust as teachers work towards improving their practice.
- Teachers are committed towards ensuring that the curricula and their craft align to the Common Core and instructional shifts. They reported that they meet during school, sit in their colleagues’ classes to observe a best practice, and often meet outside of school to discuss plans and get feedback on ideas and strategies that will help them to improve student outcomes.
- Student work is celebrated and displayed throughout the school. Students shared that rubrics and teachers feedback in the form of glows and grow are specific allowing them to clearly know what their next steps are to improve their work. Students reported that their work is held to high standards and believe they are being prepared for the next level. They shared samples of their work and talk about what they learned and can apply to other work products, demonstrating student ownership. A new student stated that she didn’t like school before because she had a problem learning. She said that since she has been in the school, her teachers have given her strategies that have enabled her to work with her learning problem and get better grades. She stated that she now enjoys coming to school every day.
- Parents reported that they receive progress reports, phone calls and/or meet with teachers about students’ progress. Parents expressed that the school provides many programs that support the academic and socio well-being of their children. For example, teachers offer classes to deepen parents’ understanding of the ELA and math curriculum and Common Core Learning Standards and provide strategies that they can use at home to support their children. As a result, families understand what their children need to accomplish to be successful and express confidence that the school is preparing children with college and career readiness skills they need for future success.