Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Highland Park Community School

Middle School K760

528 Ridgewood Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207

Principal: Jamilah Seiffuah

Date of review: March 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Brenda Perez

The School Context

The Highland Park Community School is a middle school with 110 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 73% Black, 25% Hispanic, 2% White students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.0%.

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**	**Developing**
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		
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	**Celebration**	**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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school leader maintains a supportive learning environment that conveys high expectations to all school constituents and has established a culture for learning and mutual accountability to achieve these expectations promoting college and career readiness.

Impact
School accountability systems such as the Danielson Framework for Teaching, the school core value rubric and data system hold school continuants' accountable to meeting academic expectations. Teachers and families reinforce school responsibilities in school and at home so that students develop work habits that prepare them for college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader communicates high expectations through formal and informal observations using Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Professional learning opportunities are provided to meet teachers' needs via school meetings, grade meetings, content area meetings, and network support. Additionally, the principal has individual teacher meetings utilizing a school-created rubric based on the school's core values Resilience, Empathy, Accountability, and Leadership (READ). By self-reflecting on the READ rubric it offers teachers the opportunity to self-reflect and discuss progress towards meeting their goals and improving their practice while establishing a culture of trust as teachers work towards.

- The school uses Pupil Path, a website that allows teachers, students and parents to track the students' progress towards goals. Parents receive progress reports, phone calls and/or meet with teachers about their children's progress in meeting academic expectations. Parents expressed that their children are really valued at the school. They stated that the school provides a Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.) Program during "Saturday Academy" as a platform for college and career readiness, and activities such as photography, cooking, and band. They also stated that the school leader, teachers, and the parent coordinator offer workshops to deepen parents' understanding of the English language arts (ELA) and math curricula, State assessments and Common Core Learning Standards. As a result, families understand what their children need to accomplish to be successful and express confidence that the school is preparing their children with the college and career readiness skills they need for future success.

- Students are encouraged to participate in student-led initiatives that are shared through newsletters, posters, and schools' website. Students stated that in "Who is the Boss", a student committee, students have planned a trip to Maryland and Washington DC to visit Howard University, University of Maryland at College Park, John Hopkins, and the Smithsonian. Students also spoke about their advisory groups, daily morning meets, academic supports, and clubs such as, The "Video Game League" and the "Engineering Makers". Students are empowered to have a voice in all decisions that impact them. They are on the School Leadership Team (SLT) have student council and speak at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. The school community members are considering changing the PTA to the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) to include them fully.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, teacher practice did not consistently reflect high-level questions that led to multifaceted student discussions. While teachers used scaffolds to provide all students with access to the challenging curricula, supports and extensions did not always lead to a demonstration of higher order thinking and participation.

Impact
Some students are not challenged to work to their full potential as discussions, class participation, and efforts to promote thinking were uneven and resulted in limited opportunities for increased student learning.

- During classroom visits, most teachers observed, lectured with little or no time for student discourse or work collaboratively in groups. For example, in a self -contained sixth grade math class, students worked on how to add integers using a number line. The teacher framed questions that led student thinking to form a single correct answer with only a few students participating, as the teacher asked questions to individual students who answered the teacher directly, in a back and forth manner.

- Classroom observations revealed that while some teachers used scaffolding to provide multiple entry points to support students they were inconsistently implemented across classrooms and did not ensure that all learners were meaningfully engaged in rigorous thinking and challenging tasks to maximize learning. For example, in an ELA sixth grade class, while the teacher asked questions, such as, “What does Moon Shadow think about the land of the golden mountain and the demon who live there?” students were asked to turn and talk to encourage discussion. Yet student participation yielded uneven results as questions posed required specific answers leading students through a single path of inquiry. Yet, in a sixth grade math class, small groups of students worked on “ordering integers and other rational numbers using real word examples”. Working in groups, students were asked to order the numbers, ½, ¾, 2, 3.14, -4 from least to greatest. The teacher asked students to share their answers which they supported with evidence and provided their methods.

- Discussion strategies, such as accountable talk stems provide students with support in peer-to-peer dialogue. In a social studies class, sixth grade students worked on a world religions unit. Students were asked to pretend they were Abraham and God offered them a covenant and write a journal entry about how they felt after meeting with God. Some students shared their responses with the class and the teacher asked “What did God promise Abraham and why did Abraham want this land?” Student discussions showed students beginning to use accountable talk stems such as, “I agree with or “I disagree with him,” to explain and justify their reasoning.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School curricula is planned and refined using student work and data to ensure it is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and offers students a rigorous instructional program that integrates the instructional shifts.

Impact
In order to prepare students for college and career readiness, all students including English language learners and students with disabilities engaged in rigorous common core aligned tasks that provide a range of learning experiences that foster critical thinking skills to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school implements a standards-based curriculum that consistently emphasizes rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills in all grades and classes. Curriculum maps have been created in all core subjects and include, the big ideas, Common Core standards addressed, enduring understandings, what students need to know in order to meet the standards, essential questions, assessments and multiple entry points. The curriculum is supplemented through project-based learning to encourage students to investigate research, inquire, and find solutions to real-world problems beginning in their community.

- During the summer, teachers attended project-based learning (PBL) training provided by The Buck Institute and the school leader. The school established a planning team to lead the work around the use of the PBL tools gained to develop and/or revise curriculum maps across all content areas to ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards, instructional shifts, and the school's project-based initiative. All students participate in a project-based unit task that links real-world scenarios in all content area and enable students to apply their learning to think critically, problem solve and make meaningful connections. For example, the fall project entailed all sixth grade students, across disciplines to investigate the lack of access of fresh fruits in their community. In math, the students gathered information and the categorical or numerical data were used to create surveys. In social studies, students made real-world connections and wrote argumentative essays about the role the government should play in our food production.

- Teachers meet twice weekly to collaboratively review student work data and revise instructional plans for the learning needs of students, using the "Looking at Student Work Tuning Protocol". For example, teachers used this protocol and revised a grade 6 math lesson on how to order integers and other rational numbers to include scaffolds for struggling students. The teacher stated that she would implement the suggestions in to the next math lesson. The protocol cycle entails a teacher presenting the task, present a focus question, allow colleagues to ask clarifying questions, and discuss strategies. After receiving feedback, the teacher implements the instructional strategies sharing the impact of those changes with student work products. Teachers stated that they constantly revise lessons and curriculum maps and utilize Rubicon Atlas, a web-based curriculum-mapping site, to share information with colleagues. This allows all teachers to know what different departments are covering and allows teachers the opportunity to collaborate and support the content work making learning more meaningful to students.

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

Findings
Teacher teams consistently analyze student work, assessment data and discuss instructional strategies to make adjustments to instruction in order to improve teacher practice and student outcomes. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact
Professional collaboration contributes to school wide coherence, increases the instructional capacity of teachers and contributes to effective instructional practices in the classroom that focus on improving student outcomes. Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly to review and revise lesson plans and to look at student's work to determine strengths and areas for improvement. In a teacher team meeting, teachers looked at a students' math work and discuss different strategies to help the students, who were having difficulties, gain a better understanding of ordering integers and other rational numbers. Teachers agreed to try some of the strategies suggested and bring in some sample of students work for their inquiry meeting on Friday.

- The principal identified two of the strongest teachers to work on curriculum development and lead weekly teacher teams. Each teacher attends professional learning opportunities provided by the network and Generation Ready consultants to become an expert in their content area. These teachers visit other schools to learn about best practices and then turnkey their learning during weekly teacher team meetings. Some topics include differentiation, supporting ELLs in "Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics" (STEAM), Socratic seminars, and "Using Data to Inform Instruction". The principal stated that the work of teacher teams has built a culture of trust between teachers, staff and principal.

- Teachers have formed teams based on improving curricula and PBL that are comprised of inter-disciplinary pairing such as English Language Learners (ELL) and ELA, math and science, social studies and science, coding and ELA to provide all students with cognitively engaging tasks. Teachers meet as a team on Mondays for lesson tuning and Fridays to look at student work. Protocols are chosen and modified throughout the process to meet students' specific needs. During the teacher meeting, teachers stated that they work with each other to support the content work. For example, with the collaboration of the special education and math teacher, the social studies teacher incorporated perimeter and area into her social studies lesson. Additionally, in looking at student work, stemming from November MOSL results, the staff noticed that students were not writing for sustained periods of time and with little proficiency. As a result of the analysis, teachers adopted writing across the curriculum as an instructional focus, resulting in a four-week cycle that focused on strengthening writing using the writers' workshop model, to provide all students access to engaging tasks.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, grading policies and assessment practices that consistently reflect use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment that are aligned with the school's curricula.

Impact
Teachers consistently monitor students' progress, make informed adjustments to curricula, and provide actionable feedback to students to meet the learning need of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers incorporate checks for understanding within their lessons to determine grouping and skills that need to be re-visited. Assessment practices include teachers' conferences with individual students or small groups, exit slips, self-assessment checklists, and class shares of group work. In a science sixth grade class, students were given an exit ticket and asked to answer the question, "What are the features of a successful levee?" Teachers use data sheets to track and record their findings, adjust lessons, and identify students for intervention in order to address deficits and improve student outcomes. For example, during a grade 6 technology class, students worked on creating and coding an educational game. The teacher held one-on-one student conference to discuss each student's work. The teacher assesses students' progress, addressed misunderstandings and provided ideas to help the student improve his/her work. Additionally, students' are required to write a blog in the Globaloria community about what they have learned, accomplished, enjoyed, or felt frustrated about with the day's activity.

- The school's assessments and standards mastery-based grading are aligned to the school's curricula and students are evaluated on a few of the Common Core Learning Standards at a time in order to isolate skills that they need to strengthen. Teachers identify students according to needs and develop an "Academic Intervention Plan" in which students are placed into one of the three tiers according to their assessments results. Students in tier 1 receive intervention in a course of six weeks. Students who do not respond to tier 1 are recommended to the school's student service team for identification of additional tier 2 and 3 interventions. Students in tier 2 and 3 receive a more intense intervention and progress is monitored every two weeks.

- The school uses Pupil Path, an online grade book and data-warehouse shared and used by all school constituents to inform families and students of the students' progress on a daily basis. Pupil Path allows school constituents to view the student's assignment and projects with due dates. Parents stated that the school provides them with a password to log in the system so that they can monitor the student's performance in class, homework, classwork, test and projects. In addition, families can view progress reports and assignments when a student is absent from school.