



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Sunset Park Prep

Middle School K821

**4004 4th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11232**

Principal: Jennifer Spalding

**Date of review: May 1, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Maribel Hulla**

The School Context

Sunset Park Prep is a middle school with 522 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 1% Black, 78% Hispanic, 5% White, 15% Asian students and 1% multiracial students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 15% 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 95.0%.

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	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	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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders create and communicate elevated levels of expectations for instruction and clearly define standards for professional development and classroom practices. The school orchestrates ongoing events to partner with families and to ensure student progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact

The school's culture and supportive structures result in reciprocal accountability between all constituents for student success and improved teacher practices.

Supporting Evidence

- The leadership together with staff developed a set of beliefs for high leverage expectations for instruction, guided by Danielson Framework for Teaching (DFT), the common core learning standards, and the instructional shifts. A school created "observation note" is used during instructional walk-throughs which includes the purpose of the visit whether formal, informal or a quick drop in; indication of follow up whether email, in person, written feedback or a message based on the DFT. Teachers shared they feel supported by their leaders and colleagues. The instructional feedback is considered helpful. Instructional goals are set collaboratively.
- In addition to the school beliefs, goals and philosophy, teachers and leaders share clearly defined expectations for planning units and lessons, specifically with strategies for engaging students in higher-order thinking and discussions about rigorous tasks. For example, teachers articulated that student-centered instruction is supported by knowledge of students that teachers acquire through the on-going use of checks for understanding, conversations with students and through the advisory program. The advisory program is anchored on preparing students for college and careers through self-management and peer mediation. It has proven to have positively impacted student culture. At first students felt advisory was a free period but now believe it has taught them to set personal and academic goals. "This is our time to reflect, the teachers empower us."
- Interviews with parents revealed that the school-home connection and communication has strengthened and they are highly satisfied. Family members receive regular feedback from teachers regarding student progress and next steps. Additionally, parents were enthusiastic about teachers working with their children to get them ready for college by giving them group projects and making them accountable for their learning. Families are aware of learning and progress through automated messages, progress reports, and an online technology program called pupil path. Through pupil path they can email teachers and receive quick responses. If a parent needs translation it is provided verbally and in writing.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The Danielson Framework for Teaching (DFT) and the instructional shifts inform the school's beliefs about how students learn best. Student participation in problem solving and discussions about rigorous tasks varies across classrooms.

Impact

Although there are improved teacher practices across content areas and increased higher order thinking skills in student work, these teaching practices are not yet fully embedded across all classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Conversations with teachers revealed that the DFT strengthened the mutual trust between leaders and the faculty. These conversations and the sharing of best practices solidified the school's beliefs that all students can learn when they are engaged and comfortable to take risks in a supportive, inclusive environment. Teachers shared that the school's instructional focus, "How do we, as a community, shift our practice around questioning, discussion, and student work" has resulted in improved teacher capacity in developing and executing higher order questions.
- In most classrooms students participated in critical thinking groups and discussed tasks asking each other questions using prompts and discussion stems. During a grade 8 social studies lesson, students engaged in a conversation about "What would society be like without a government?" In a grade 8 advisory, students were seated in groups discussing a scenario regarding how they would handle a friend cheating in school and becoming the Valedictorian. Students were given guidelines with guiding questions to use during their discussion and debate.
- A review of student work across grades and subjects reflects high levels of critical thinking in argumentative and opinion writing, analysis of informational text and in showing evidence of multiple strategies to solve mathematical problems. In a eighth grade math class, students worked in groups to plan a beach vacation. Students were asked to generate a 5 number summary for a set of data. The task required the calculation of the interquartile range, then creation of a box and whisker plot to show the distribution of the data relating to beaches and plotting them in pairs. Students were challenged via higher-order questions that led to discussions where students' thinking was pushed by the teacher and in some cases their peers. However, these practices were not fully embedded across all subjects and grades.
- Students shared that they have opportunities to discuss lessons, tasks, and their work products such as, written responses to reading or problem solving in math. Teachers ensure that students rotate as groups and are challenged to ask questions in groups. In a grade 6 English language arts class, students supported one another with "developing strong discussion questions" to learn and interpret more about characters from the novel "Outsiders." Students used a laptop to input their questions and provided details from the text regarding the characters.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers analyze student work to plan and refine units and academic tasks for a diversity of learners.

Impact

Curricular decisions produce instructional coherence and promote college and career readiness by purposeful integration of instructional shifts. Student data analysis results in cognitive engagement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school implements Common Core aligned curricula in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science and social studies. Unit plans across grades and content areas include instructional shifts, enduring understandings, essential questions and differentiated activities to meet the needs of all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. In a grade 6 social studies plan addressing the different ways historians, archaeologists and geographers investigate the past, students were expected to demonstrate deep understanding by drawing inferences from factual information and using text based evidence to write a strong thesis. Opportunities for students to make real world connections such as “How does farming make sustainable communities possible?” were included as well. Vocabulary words paired with pictures, word webs and graphic organizers were indicated as scaffolds for ELLs. Concept maps and a T-chart to support understanding were provided for the students with disabilities.
- In Math, performance tasks embed multi-step higher order thinking strategies and impact teacher and student learning. Student work in partnerships to solve challenging multi-step word problems allowing teachers to gain insight into student thinking. Lessons and tasks attend to conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency applications. For example, in a grade 6 unit focused operations and fractions, students were expected to explain, “How do operations with fractions compare to operations with whole numbers and decimals?” Supports for students included, manipulatives, students working in pairs, and review of the terms divisor, dividend and quotient. Examples of different forms of the division process were provided specifically for ELLs.
- Administrators and teachers regularly re-examine their belief system about how students learn best. A shared understanding of student engagement, through consistently analyzing student work and refining plans has evolved. For example, an ELA team recommends reviewing and analyzing question prompts to continue to increase student engagement. Teachers created a template called, “FAST ELA-R Planning” to support them with creating next steps and organizing their planning. It addresses what the students will learn and what they need to know before introducing the new topic.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practices consistently reflect the use of common assessments and student self-assessment to monitor student progress towards goals and provide actionable feedback. Data from student work products is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Impact

The school has a system for analyzing student work and tracking student achievement which allows teachers to determine student progress towards goals and adjust instruction accordingly to meet the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses common assessments in all content areas, such as performance based and interim assessments, running records and rubrics, which provide information on student progress and measures performance growth. Teachers also monitor reading levels using class- tracking forms three times a year. This data is used to form reading groups during ELA intervention and for providing targeted supported by service providers. Teachers Student groups vary based on data and checks for understanding during whole group assessments. Students shared “Sometimes we work in the same group but sometimes we don’t. It depends on the lesson and subject.”
- Teachers and leaders consistently track academic progress, outline next steps for students and analyze student work in inquiry teams. This data and information is usually incorporated in daily lessons and plans.
- Teachers across the grades ask students to fill out exit slips and regularly encourage peer and self-assessment. The use of ongoing checks for understanding to meet all students learning needs is in evidence across classrooms.. Students stated, in ELA they are given checklists and rubrics so that they could self and peer assess their writing.
- The school has established an Advisory Team. Members collaborate with school leaders to plan, prepare and support all students with making social and academic gains. Advisors help students understand where they’re at academically and how to self-manage and solve conflicts peacefully.

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

All teacher teams systematically engage in an inquiry approach to learning by analyzing instructional practices, student work and data. Teachers play an essential role in key decisions that affect the learning across the school.

Impact

The work of teacher teams and teacher leaders has strengthened teacher instructional capacity and resulted in instructional cohesiveness and improved student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers participate in weekly planning meetings to collaboratively set expectations and develop curricula and assessments. Teachers were observed discussing student work and setting goals for re-teaching. Grade level teams review all tasks and ensure alignment to the common core learning standards. Questioning and discussion techniques are a focus across all disciplines. According to the data in the School Quality Guide, the school is meeting their target closing the achievement gap, student achievement, and student progress.
- During an ELA teacher team meeting teachers discussed recent NYS ELA test data and trends. The meeting continued with a discussion on how to plan for the rest of the year to further support student goals. Decisions regarding reading interventions based on one to one conferences with students were discussed as well. The meeting concluded with a “Plus and Delta” period where teachers state what they liked about the meeting and strategies they discussed, and what they would change. Specifically, teachers decided to end the year with a shared text to get students mindset off testing. They also made suggestions as to which books would be applicable for end of year reading. .
- Teachers interviewed shared that team meetings such as the Cabinet, Data, and Grade teams are beneficial to their professional growth and instructional practices. Teachers participate in these meetings and often lead the meeting. Specifically, staff feel empowered because the “leadership and their colleagues support them. The feedback helps with planning and is more than a chat and written notice. It is positive and formative.” Instructional feedback from colleagues and leaders assist with setting professional and academic goals, adjusting and refining assessments, identifying areas of misunderstandings, designing questioning and discussion strategies, and reviewing lessons and tasks to ensure alignment to the common core learning standards.