

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Lexington Academy

Elementary School M072

**131 East 104 Street
Manhattan
NY 10029**

Principal: Antonio Hernandez

**Date of review: April 1, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit**

The School Context

The Lexington Academy is an elementary school with 563 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 15% Black, 82% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.7%

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	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 consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide the necessary support to staff so that they meet those expectations. In turn, the staff effectively communicates high expectations to students and families and provides students with focused support.

Impact

The communication of high expectations for all and the high level of support given to meet those expectations lead to a culture for learning and of mutual accountability within the school and successful partnerships with families that enable student progress and preparation for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders share high expectations with the entire staff through the morning message with updates, professional development opportunities, and reminders. The principal summarized expectations succinctly, stating that he expected all staff, “to research what students are doing, compliment what is going well, and teach what students need to learn”. Staff members are supported in meeting those expectations through regular professional collaborations with administrators, mentors, consultants or coaches within the school, as well as at outside professional learning opportunities.
- Students are reminded of and supported with meeting the high expectations set for them. Students are referred to as “scholars” at the school. They participate in rigorous work in class and outside of class. Teachers plan with the next grade band rubric to provide extensions for students who are able to do the next grade’s work. Sixth graders receive ongoing support throughout the year from their teachers and other staff members to prepare for their oral defense at the end of the school year. There is a bulletin board of teachers’ college graduation photographs set up to remind students of their goal to pursue college after high school. Celebrations of student accomplishments are also displayed in hallway displays depicting the “Dream Scholars” (those students who have been accepted into specialized high school), the school’s chess and tennis champions, and the “Girls Who Code” program, a girl’s software club, among others.
- Families receive regular communications from the school and have various opportunities to work with the school to help support student achievement. The school communicates with families through the Lexington Parent Buzz, a newsletter, via phone calls, emails, meetings, workshops, and parent teacher conferences. Every grade has set goals for their work with parents. Workshops presented by teachers for parents have included: “Creating Math Games – How to reinforce math concepts and skills at home” for pre-kindergarten parents, “Educational Technology” and “Arts and Crafts – Ways to deepen your child’s knowledge through the arts” for grade two parents, “Building Routine At Home/Organization Strategies” and “Preparing for the 4th Grade State Exam” for grade four parents. Parents have been trained in the Reading Rescue Program with Teachers’ College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) to support paraprofessionals and teachers with their work with struggling readers.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated belief about how students learn best. Teachers consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula across classrooms, but those entry points are not always strategically planned and emphasis on teacher support and facilitation sometimes limits student-to-student discussion.

Impact

Students are appropriately challenged and have opportunities to demonstrate thinking and work that reflect high levels of thinking and participation but not yet full ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, students are engaged in work that is aligned to the Common Core, the instructional shifts and the school's beliefs about how students learn best. The administrators shared that they believe in the whole child and that children learn best when the school meets students' hierarchical needs first. Across classrooms, routines and supports were evident to help students understand and engage in their work. Among supports observed were posters and charts at eye level for students, posted goals, work displayed with actionable feedback, and guided work with teachers and paraprofessionals. Teachers also sang or said certain phrases that announced transitions. Moreover, students did grade level work. In a first grade class, students engaged in small turn and talks that required them to discuss their experiences with a partner as well as reference texts read in the past. The teacher modeled what and how she expected them to talk about before asking questions such as "This reminds me of the book we read about 'The Pigeon Who Drove the Bus'... Does this remind you of a book that you read this year?" In a sixth grade class, students were given a math problem not to solve immediately but to figure out what the problem was asking them to solve (the area or the volume) and explain and defend their thinking.
- Across classrooms, teaching strategies provided multiple entry points into the curricula. In a kindergarten class, students engaged in partner reading using resources such as high frequency words in English and Spanish. During a third grade poetry lesson, students differentiated between similes and metaphors in poems, as well as wrote their own poems supported by a poetry checklists, extraordinary vocabulary word lists, and a figurative language chart. Students also had access to a list with sensory vocabulary for touch, sound, smell, sight and taste. Additionally, students used a spellcheck box to check their spelling during writing. In another lower grade class, students wore necklaces with sentence starters to help them during their conversations with their group mates.
- Although students were engaged in rigorous academic tasks and there were many resources used across classrooms to support students, teaching practices did not always allow students to own their learning. Across classrooms, teachers facilitated students' discussions limiting students' opportunities to own these discussions and their learning.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff ensure that the curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, content standards, and the instructional shifts across grades and subject areas. Rigorous habits and higher order tasks are emphasized in the curricula and embedded throughout the contents and grades and curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

The school's coherent curricular decisions and planning opportunities for refining curricula ensure that all students, across all grades and subject areas, have opportunities to engage in rigorous higher order skill that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school ensures that tasks and the curricula are rigorous for all students. Teachers plan academic tasks and curricula using Common Core aligned resources such as Go Math, Engage NY, CMP3 and the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP). Unit plans are developed with the standards and the instructional shifts in mind. In a second grade teacher-designed unit in social studies, students engaged in a project-based learning unit on New York City. The unit called for students to choose a related topic of study, develop questions, conduct research and use a checklist to support and monitor their work in groups. In the sixth grade, students improve their speaking, research, and writing skills as they prepare throughout the school year for their oral defense of their work at an end-of-year presentation.
- To build coherence throughout the grades and subject areas, the school has focused on a few curricula practices that all teachers are supported to implement in the classroom through ongoing professional development. Unit plans incorporate the standards as well as opportunities for talk moves, extended writing pieces, Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) and number talk practices that promote student discussion in class. Besides the delineated content, lesson plans also include possibilities for celebrations, ideas for differentiation and vocabulary development, tiered activities (low, medium, high) and accommodations. Additionally, the school promotes book clubs within grade levels throughout the school.
- Teachers plan and refine curricula using data. After analyzing third graders' scores and work after an exam, teachers decided to reteach a lesson on fractions with adjustments to the learning targets in order to focus the lesson and the skills assessed. In a lesson on poetry, the teacher, upon review of student work developed developmentally appropriate rubrics to guide the students through an activity around similes and metaphors. Additionally, she added visual cues to her sentences that exemplified similes and metaphors to ensure that her struggling readers had access to these models.

Findings

The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of on-going checks for understanding as well as student self- and peer assessments

Impact

Results of the analyses of common assessments, and students' self- and peer assessments allow teachers to adjust instruction and curricula to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school consistently analyzes data to identify trends across and within grades. Some of the assessments administered are the Teachers College and Fountas and Pinnell, running records, writing on demand tasks, test simulations or mock exams, and Assessment Pro tasks that allow teachers to test between benchmarks. Thus far, exam analyses have shown some the following trends in class reading: in the third grade from September to January, students' reading levels progressed up to levels Q and R with the percentage of students at level O increasing from 5% to 15% and level N from 5% to 26%. In the first grade, the levels spanned from A to G in September and from B to J in January. The percentage of students at level C decreased from 48% to 23% as students made upward movement to more advanced levels.
- Across classrooms, teachers regularly confer with students and use that data to group and make instructional adjustments. In a kindergarten class, the teacher conferred with students while taking notes on next steps for each student. Some of the notes read [student name] needs to look at first letter, [student name] needs to use picture, [student name] needs to go back and reread.
- There was evidence of student self- and peer assessment across the grades and subject areas as well as goal setting. In a fourth grade class, students used a template "Glorious Goal Setting" to list their goals in different subject areas. This chart written in English and Spanish allows students to write down monthly and yearly goals and is accompanied by a template/contract that asks students to be specific about their goals and list the steps they will take to reach those goals. The template /contract is signed by the student and the teacher and includes a section for teacher notes. In a second grade class, as students were preparing for their group presentation, they had the opportunity to videotape their practicing. Students gave each other feedback on the videotaped presentations as well as self-critiqued their presentation and developed next steps for themselves.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations during which they play an integral role in key decisions

Impact

This practice of collaboration has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement as well as teachers participating in distributive leadership structures that allow them to affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet at minimum four to five times a week with every grade having a blocked time every week to collaborate, as well as additional single preparation period in common. Because of the work teachers have done around data analysis, they were able to identify the need for “talk moves” which has become a school wide initiative. Teachers shared the ways in which they have impacted one another’s practice through sharing templates and ideas for exit tickets and providing professional development sessions for each other. The special education teachers and the psychologist, for example, provided professional development on the present levels of performance of students for the staff to help them better understand student goals.
- Teachers also collaborate to specifically look at teacher practice. Teachers mentor one another and model teachers and sustain lab sites at the school. Teachers developed the school’s “Blueprint for Learning Walk” to facilitate their work during inter-visitations.
- Teachers have a say in key decisions that affect their practice and student learning across the school. Some of the work they have led or initiated has been around the planning of the school’s transition from offering transitional bilingual education classes to developing a dual language program. They have been an integral part of the process from gathering data within the school and from families and visiting model sites. Teachers have adapted their curricula. For example, a second grade teacher decided to teach about Ruby Bridges through a play. Once the unit was approved, the students worked to write and stage the play, which was presented to the entire school.