



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Lower Lab School

Elementary School M077

**1700 3rd Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10128**

Principal: Michael Goldspiel

Date of review: March 27, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Darryl Alhadeff

The School Context

Lower Lab school is a gifted and talented elementary school with 348 students from grade K through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 8% Hispanic, 63% White, and 21% Asian students. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 97.0%.

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	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Focus	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	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Teaching practices in all classrooms strategically provide multiple entry points and high quality supports, including targeted questioning and discussions techniques. The teachers have a shared belief on how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework and reflects the instructional shifts.

Impact

All learners are engaged in appropriate challenging tasks. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms students are engaged in high level cognitive activity. For example, students in the fourth grade participated in a Socratic Seminar. Students answered open ended questions and represented high level thinking. For example, the learning objective was, “Students will identify, compare and discuss common themes in two texts *The Giver* and *On Turning Ten*”. One of the questions at the end of the seminar was, “Is it easier to be ten and older, or younger than ten”? Cite evidence from both texts to support your writing.
- The school provides multiple entry points for all learners. In a second grade class, students were in four different groups differentiated by ability. The most at risk group had teacher support. The extension activity for the advanced learner’s was an extension of the game, Circles and Stars. The children used two dice and rolled both for the number of circles and stars to create group combinations up to 12x12. The teacher walked around and observed the work and some students were able to move to the next level.
- The schools’ shared belief around providing development of reading habits and behavior opportunities for constant student engagement with books was evident across classrooms through guided reading, read alouds, reading partnerships and book clubs as well as independent reading. Some students received multi-sensory instruction to develop their phonological skills.
- In a fifth grade classroom, students were in a circle having a discussion. The classroom was set up with students in an inner and outer circle. The children in the outer were advising and sending notes to those in the inner circle when they had information to add. Students in both the inner and outer circle used their notebooks to track thoughts, cite evidence, clarify ideas and jot questions they wanted to discuss. The students then initiated discussions on the big ideas.
- Across classrooms, teachers strategically use scaffolds, opportunities for choice and other teaching practices to create a variety of ways for students to access content, learning projects and tasks. In fourth grade social studies class, the research project for the NY colonies had a menu for the students to choose from. The teaching assistant was working with a struggling group doing read aloud and think aloud with individual students. Another teacher pulled an advanced group to lead a discussion on “Do we see cause and effect in other areas besides history”?

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school uses common curriculum, aligned assessments, rubrics and grading policies to acquire a clear understanding of student progress toward benchmarks. However, assessment practices need to be further refined to track progress across all subject areas.

Impact

Teacher teams and staff make effective adjustments to curricula in most subject areas to meet all students' learning needs and provide feedback so all students make progress meeting their goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaborate on designing and modifying assessments, rubrics and grading policies. This year the staff worked on a system of summative assessment as a supplement. The purpose was to assess students according to agree upon standards.
- Assessments are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. These choices deliver a range of data to sustain collaborative inquiry and to continuously improve instruction. For example, some of the data used are running records, whole book assessment, pre and post assessments in writing and math, checklists and rubrics. The assessments are normed on all grades. For example, a student created rubric was used in a peer review of math posters. The children titled the rubric, High Quality Math Poster Peer Review. The two main areas were organization and mathematical thinking.
- K-5 students are pre-assessed in three genres of narrative writing. Teacher's College (TC) rubrics are used to assess both pre and post assessments. The data collected by teacher teams is used to create small groups and differentiate instruction. Teachers use data to modify instruction. For example, in a second grade mini-unit on opinion writing, the teacher realized that the students were struggling to make sense of the opinion writing unit because they lacked fundamental understanding of a claim and text details. The unit was rewritten with more supports.
- Running records are administered three times a year. Teachers use Google Drive to share the results. Students that do not meet the benchmarks are referred to intervention. In the classrooms the teachers work with the most in need students daily. The students are placed in small groups depending on their need. For example, there are guided reading groups, word study groups, shared reading groups to support fluency and close reading to support comprehension and synthesis. In a guided reading group students are reading a book with scaffolding on their instructional level; the group of two to three students is closely monitored. As students read the text the teacher does informal running records, listening to each student read.
- Mathematics is assessed using Early Childhood Assessment in Mathematics (ECAM) and TERC pre and post assessments. Some specific examples of how teachers use assessment data in literacy and math to adjust curricula and instruction include: rubric, checklists, conference notes, exit tickets, student goal setting, self-evaluation checklists, extended day flexible grouping and anecdotal sharing of student performance. However, there are missed opportunities to use these formative assessment practices across other subject areas.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff ensure the alignment of the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. The school promotes curricula rigor and embeds academic tasks that provide critical thinking across grades for all learners.

Impact

Common Core aligned curricula units of study across subject's results in instructional coherence and rigorous academic tasks foster high level thinking skills and promote college and career readiness for all student.

Supporting Evidence

- In mathematics, the school has written their own curricula aligned to the common core. The school receives professional learning support from Math in the City and Metamorphosis consultants. The common core alignment work engaged teachers in the development of mathematical habits. For example, the Mathematics unit *Operations and Algebraic Thinking* for kindergarten expects students to understand addition as putting together and adding to, and understand subtraction as taking apart and taking from. Curricula is planned to expect students to represent addition and subtraction with objects, fingers, mental images, drawings, sounds (e.g. Claps), acting out situations, verbal explanations/expressions or equations. The planning document encompasses all grades in the same style, using student work to guide instruction and ongoing curriculum mapping to further support mathematics alignment to the common core and the instructional shifts. The Common Core alignment work in mathematics has resulted in accelerated math standards for the school. This year 40% of the expectations at every grade level reflect above grade-level standards (3rd graders are expected to master 4th grade or higher benchmarks in 40% of the curriculum they learn). This is a 50% increase from last year.
- The school uses Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) curriculum for literacy. With coaching from TCRWP and teacher teams increased rigor was written into the reading and writing units of study. For example, a fourth grade lesson illustrated rigor by including a Socratic Seminar. The Socratic Seminar is defined as a support for students that allow them to think for themselves, question, and communicate with others and to promote divergent thinking. The students were expected to engage in high level questioning comparing quotes from different genres, a poem and book.
- All lesson plans and units of study are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and incorporate the instructional shifts. For example, in a fourth grade social studies lesson about the American Revolution, the task was analyzing primary sources in relation to cause and effect in history. Struggling students and enrichment groups were both noted on the lesson plan.
- The school created *The Lab Learning Progression* with the purpose of aligning the common core standards to the gifted and talented population at PS77. The Progression includes reading, writing, mathematics, social studies and social emotional. For example, kindergarten common core math standards expects student to learn addition and subtraction to 5, yet at Lower Lab, the kindergarten students are expected to add and subtract within twenty.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leader uses an array of strategies and provides effective supports for the schools high expectations. The school implements a range of supports that promote a strong partnership with families and engages them in supporting their children's progress.

Impact

The communication of high expectations has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability among staff and families in supporting student progress toward college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff has a set of clear, systematic structures for articulating high expectations and sharing with students. Advisory meets with fifth grade students to focus on building life skills. Extra teacher support is used to make the heterogeneous groups smaller.
- Staff member implement effective strategies for communicating high expectations for students and parents. Some examples are publishing parties, back to school night and teachers' school based support team where the use of Blooms Taxonomy is used to develop projects and tasks in class. In addition, Lab Weekend Updates and Teachers College memo highlighting the work going on in the school. Moreover, the Lower Lab website is maintained by the school's parent coordinator and each teacher has a news blog.
- The Principal runs a book club for parents. The book club took place over a six week period. To date they read *Being Wrong* and *Mindset* by Carol Dweck. In addition to the parents the staff also read *Mindset*. The idea was for the staff and parents to approach the students in a similar way. The big idea of *Mindset* is that children are independent and can control their own learning and behavior. In addition, there is a large calendar outside the Principals office listing workshops for parents. For example, some of the workshops offered are, Middle School Preparation and Testing: How does it impact middle school? In addition, workshops that support college and career readiness are: Student led conferences, Student experts, how they teach their peers and Advisory: How does it work?
- The school has Marvelous Mondays, a professional development cycle with teacher led offerings. The Professional Development committee sends out a survey to the staff with multiple ideas generated by the staff. Some of the choices for cycle 2 were Questioning and Discussion Techniques, Online Teaching Tools, and Promoting Student –Self Assessment. Teachers selected choices based on their needs and interest.

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

Teachers across the school engage in structured inquiry-based collaborative teams that use protocol to analyze student work, look at assessment data and assess student work. Distributive leadership structures are embedded across the school.

Impact

The schools strong culture of professional collaboration promotes shared leadership, strengthen teacher capacity, and contribute to school-wide instructional coherence. Targeted students meet their goals.

Supporting Evidence

- The schools prep schedule supports grade level planning, vertical communication and refining tasks to the Common Core Learning Standards. Inquiry sessions are held Monday afternoons. Inquiry teams meet weekly to check on targeted students. The teachers want to ensure the progress of the student's goals. For example, the current learning goal in second grade is retelling with detail.
- Teacher teams meet to effectively implement systems to monitor the lowest third in the school. They analyze data and classroom practices that inform instruction. Recently, they analyzed running record results to determine instructional strategies to target below grade level readers. The second grade team had evidence that retelling in their grade needed to be refined. During Tuesday planning sessions, teachers meet and discuss student data in vertical teams (K-5). The work is documented in Google Drive. Teachers utilize Data Driven Dialogue protocol to analyze assessments results and plan instruction.
- Administrators and teacher leaders were able to identify distributive leadership structures that are deeply rooted in day to day operations. Two teachers were selected to run professional development because of their strength in each area as evidenced by Measurement of Teacher Practice (MOTP). Inquiry groups are led by teacher facilitators that alternate weekly. Teacher team meetings are also led by staff members on an alternate basis. The school also several committees that meet to support the school. The current groups are: RTI implementation, professional development learning cycles and social emotional learning. The school seeks to create an alternate schedule to provide flexibility so staff can serve on a variety of committees.
- During the teacher team meeting, teachers had an agenda with five items to address. They reviewed and analyzed Tuesday's data meeting results and discussed what strategies they already tried then reviewed running record data and goal setting information for students. Teachers organized students into small targeted instructional groups based on skills to be strengthened and planned next steps, which was to divide up small group planning work and gather resources.