



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Liberty School

Elementary School M089

**201 Warren Street
New York
NY 10282**

Principal: Veronica Najjar

Date of review: March 24, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Lucia Perez-Medina

The School Context

The Liberty School is an elementary school with 440 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 15% Hispanic, 62% White, 15% Asian students, and 6% Multi-Racial students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 11% 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 96.0%.

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	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		
<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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for instruction and create opportunities for professional learning and support for staff. The school partners with families to support student progress toward meeting academic, behavioral, and social expectations.

Impact

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

Supporting Evidence

- The school offers a series for families called Learning links, where teachers give presentations for parents about learning that is happening in classrooms. For example, one learning link opportunity for families was the topic “Just Right Books”. During this event, parents had the opportunity to learn what it means for a book to be “just right” for a child and how teachers determine which books are too challenging or too easy for a child. One parent stated that a monthly event called Family Friday helps parents see what and how their child learns and provides them with an opportunity to enjoy engaging in projects with their children and observing how they take pride in their work. In addition, a Curriculum Night presentation informs families about the school’s curricula, classroom policies, and procedures.
- During the teacher meeting, teachers shared that they participate with paraprofessionals in eight-session professional development cycles within various study groups to support instructional expectations on topics such as such as assessment, word study, and number sense and operations. Teachers stated that during the 70-minute professional development block on Mondays, administrators share expectations and hold teachers accountable via having them present and share best practices. In addition, teachers expressed that the school’s yearlong calendar communicates expectations and professional development opportunities and that weekly newsletters also highlight best practices or something tied to expectations.
- During the parent interview, parents expressed that they completed a parent survey on what types of workshops they felt were important. One parent stated, “The principal supports our ideas and the school offers a series of workshops on topics we are interested in.” Some of these workshops include testing, the new report card, literacy, math, Common Core Standards, bullying prevention, puberty, and middle school selection. In addition, parents explained that communication about workshops and events is usually provided in the weekly blast called the PTA Tuesday News, the school website which has all the links to workshop materials, and through flyers, class websites, blogs, and weekly email blasts.
- The school has established “Friday Files” where every Friday, students bring home their graded papers with comments and are expected to sit with their parents and review them together. Parents stated that they were notified about Friday Files at curriculum night and are reminded though out the year via email and conferences. One parent stated, “This helps us know what the children are currently learning and gives us a weekly update on their child’s progress”.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Although the school's curricula is rigorous and coherent, the school has not yet fully embedded multiple entry points so that lessons fully challenge students and engage all students in high levels of thinking and discussion.

Impact

Lessons do not consistently challenge all students, particularly high performers to their full potential, thus limiting opportunities for them to engage in higher order thinking tasks and discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- In most cases, all students worked on the same task with no visible modifications for the most struggling or accelerated learners. In some cases, several students quickly completed the assigned task and waited for the rest of the group to complete the task, while others struggled with the task independently. For example, during a group lesson in a second grade science class, all students were asked to complete a worksheet and create a diorama. Seven students completed the assignment and waited for the rest of the class to complete the assignment, while four students struggled with describing their work to their partner. During a fourth grade math lesson, all students were directed to draw a line plot using data collected and complete a worksheet. Nine students completed all six steps in the worksheet and waited for the rest of the group to complete the steps. In a third grade class visited all students were expected to read about the inside of a long house, take notes, draw a picture of a longhouse and label it. Eleven students were able to complete the task within a few minutes and waited for further instructions, while four students waited for additional guidance with their text to write notes independently.
- Although students had opportunities to engage in partnership discussions across some classrooms visited, there were uneven levels of student thinking and participation. During a third grade English language arts lesson, the teacher asked students to discuss the main idea of their books with their partners. Some students discussed the book with their partners, while other students didn't interact or respond to their partner. In one Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class three groups of students completed the same graphic organizer independently. Although students sat in partnerships and in small groups they did not engage in discussion with their partners or within their groups. One group completed the task with five students sitting quietly waiting for the teacher, while another group had difficulty completing the task without access to supports such as partnership talk, sentence starters, or other scaffolds to accelerate their learning.
- In a second grade class visited, students were able to explore their thinking, use evidence to support their reasoning and had supports available for students, however this practice was not evident across most classes visited. In some classrooms visited, there were no strategic aids such as the discussion prompts or sentence starters available to help students including English language learners articulate their learning to their partners.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Using student work and data, the school has developed and purposefully implemented and refined curricula aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.

Impact

Coherence of units of study across grades and content areas promote college and career readiness skills. Curricular enhancements support diverse learners having curricular access.

Supporting Evidence

- The school supplements the Math TERC investigations with resources from Engage NY and Math in the City. Every grade gets a pacing calendar and Common Core supplements and revises curricula documents as needed. For example after math assessment teachers do an item analysis and plan together what curriculum adjustments need to be made. The concept of fractions was identified as a challenge so teachers revised fractions' units. Some teachers attended a fraction workshop and shared their learning with colleagues to inform adjustment of the pacing guide based on new information learned about fractions and student data.
- Curricular documents reflect alignment to standards with tasks such as: including multimedia and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and, interpreting and computing fractions, interpreting figurative language used in a text, and formulating questions and hypotheses.
- Revised higher-order thinking questions were included in curricular documents which had questions such as: "How does identifying and discussing the elements of a story help a reader's comprehension?"; "How can common denominators change your thinking about the quotient of your division problem"; and "Based on what you know about the American Revolution, what might it represent in the novel?"
- Reading and writing units are designed to purposefully to incorporate fiction and non-fiction text. This was evident in the second grade Thinking about Text through Author Study unit where students read books and relevant articles and make inferences based on evidence from text.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Assessment practices are aligned to the school’s curricula and incorporate use of rubrics, feedback and ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Assessment data provides teachers and students with actionable feedback on students’ performance across most subject areas, resulting in most teachers addressing immediate needs of individuals or groups of students to accelerate their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- During a first grade math lesson, after the teacher used thumbs up and thumbs down to see who didn’t understand the task, the teacher addressed a group of student’s misunderstanding of one key math vocabulary word “area” as the teacher circulated the classroom.
- In a second grade English language arts class, students worked in groups to analyze character traits and used a rubric to self-asses their work. In addition, during the student meeting, students articulated that they get feedback from their peers and that teachers give them feedback in their reading notebooks. One student stated, “I use my checklist in writing so I know what I am missing.” Most students were able to articulate their strengths and next steps for learning.
- The following assessments are used to provide data which assists in adjusting curricula and instruction: running records, stop and jots, on-demand writing assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of units of study, learning progression rubrics to evaluate writing; conference notes, in order to create small groups for targeted instruction, and mid-workshop check-ins which include hand signals or think-pair-share. Teachers use the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments to monitor students’ independent and instructional reading levels three times a year in order to plan small group work to address deficits in the grade level reading progressions. Teacher’s stated that they have seen growth in student reading levels.

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

Distributive leadership structures help build leadership capacity. Scheduled professional collaborations allow teams of teachers to share content knowledge and instructional strategies for improving teaching and learning.

Impact

Structured team collaborations have resulted in opportunities for teachers to share progress of pedagogical practice and improvement in student progress. Additionally, leadership structures build capacity that influences student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- A vertical team of teachers engaged in an inquiry cycle that focused on developing greater coherence across the grades with regards to computational strategies. Teachers discussed the importance of having a “common language” in teacher use of representations and mathematical vocabulary. This work added to the school’s interest in increasing student use of academic language.
- Teachers meet every Monday for professional learning and once every other week for a 90-minute block for inquiry. During the first grade teacher team meeting, teachers articulated that they focus on reflecting on teaching practice and analyze assessment data to improve student outcomes. Teachers discussed how they could move students from using drawings to solve problems, to using more efficient strategies, such as counting on a number line and grouping numbers. One teacher stated that after analyzing student’s math work samples, she observed that students’ addition strategies needed support and discussed strategies to use for “commutative property” and a follow-up assessment to monitor affect of adjustments on student learning.
- During the teacher interview, teachers shared that grade leaders’ weekly meetings with school leaders provide opportunities for reflective discussions, and vertical and horizontal instructional alignment. One teacher stated, “These collaborations allow teacher leaders to plan, design, and spearhead teacher-initiated professional development sessions.”
- The Executive Function inquiry team is currently focusing on a group of students who have trouble following sequence and following multi-step directions. This group observes students in the classroom and collaboratively discusses the effectiveness of the strategies that are being implemented.