

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 111 Adolph S. Ochs

Elementary – Middle School M111

**440 West 53 Street
Manhattan
NY 10019**

Principal: Irma Medina

**Dates of review: January 9, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

P.S. 111 Adolph S. Ochs is an elementary – middle school with 533 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 16% Black, 58% Hispanic, 12% White, and 12% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.7%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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	Developing
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	Developing

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	Developing

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.	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Teacher teams and distributed leadership structures promote the ongoing deepening of the school's work in meeting school goals and strengthening their instructional capacity.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has been the backbone of improvement in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and meeting student needs.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers are part of a grade level team that have spent much of this year working on making adjustments to strengthen the curriculum and develop units that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. They were an integral part of identifying the school's instructional focus on developing strategies to improve discussion and questioning. Teachers on both observed teams emphasized that this year's work has actively helped them to reflect and strengthen their own practice and, in particular, has promoted a level of collaboration that has sparked more inter-visitation, more interest in shared practice and a greater understanding of data.
- The 3rd grade teacher team engaged in a protocol to analyze a set of math word problems. They selected work done by a range of students but focused their inquiry on how to make word problems more readily solvable for students who are English language learners (ELLs). After finishing their analysis protocol, the teachers brainstormed ideas to help students recognize the many words that mean approximately the same thing that they may come across in problems. They narrowed it down to two different strategies they might try, and each teacher was to attempt the strategy and report back the following week.
- The school is currently participating in the Teacher Leader Program (TLP). A team of teacher leaders has been attending the monthly sessions and then they turnkey the protocols and practices acquired to their colleagues. This work has encouraged and enabled other teachers to take a chance serving as agenda setters or facilitators of the team meetings. This renewed focus on strengthening the teams has supported other areas of the school's work, such as the efforts to strengthen and align curriculum and pedagogy and is the primary driver of change taking place in the school. This is a positive change since the school's previous Quality Review.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Pedagogy varies across the school, and does not fully reflect a unified understanding of best practices that engage and support students.

Impact

Students are sometimes experiencing engaging classroom activities, but these practices are inconsistent and, as a result, students are not consistently producing meaningful work.

Supporting Evidence

- As the school deepens its understanding of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, there is a common language around practice that is developing, but there is not yet a fully articulated common belief about practice or understanding of how students learn best that serves as a foundation for that practice. The administrative team emphasized that their basic expectations for every classroom are that teachers incorporate good questioning, ensure lots of student interaction, and that there is evidence of planning. There is also an expectation that teachers will use the workshop model and that they will be meeting students at their own entry level. Some of these elements were apparent in some classrooms but in others, key pieces were not evident. When asked about the common elements of their teaching, teachers responded that a main belief was that students benefit from a wide variety of styles and as such, there is no singular philosophy or system that undergirds the school's practices. An example of this would be the middle school classrooms. In one math class, students were assigned to work in groups but for the most part worked on their own regardless of their grouping. In a science class, although the task assigned was not of sufficient rigor, students were interacting, speaking animatedly to one another and working together to complete the assigned task.
- The levels of rigor and differentiation ranged across the school. In some classrooms, teachers scaffolded the mini-lessons or worked with small groups to either support or extend learning, while in others, extended whole class lessons without student conversation or modeling were observed. As the school has been actively working on improving questioning, a few classes observed showed teachers used strong questioning techniques to gradually promote understanding or prompt the students to think critically.
- In rooms where robust classroom discussion was observed, it was evident that students were deeply engaged in their learning. Two rooms visited included students challenging one another by asking probing questions having to defend their perspectives. However, in the remaining rooms observed, there were several missed opportunities for student discussion in which teachers fed the answers to students rather than having them explore possibilities with one another.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teacher teams and school leadership are engaged in the ongoing work of unpacking, aligning, synthesizing and modifying their curricula in their effort to meet all students' needs.

Impact

There are still some aspects of curricula that are not completely defined, leading to learning experiences for students that are not yet consistently rigorous and coherent.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has recently adopted new, Common Core-aligned curricula in literacy and math. They are currently using Core Knowledge and GO Math! in kindergarten through grade 5, and Expeditionary Learning and Connected Mathematics Project 3 in the middle school. In doing so, they have still retained some of the best work from their previous curricula. This has meant that they have had to unpack each curriculum and find the best ways to make it their own, particularly in writing. Teacher teams have been responsible for much of the progress that has been made in this area, but there is still more to be done, particularly with science and social studies. There was little evidence during classroom visits that these subjects are taught regularly and in rigorous, engaging ways.
- Although the school is working on developing coherent curriculum maps, there was inconsistent evidence of tasks and activities that promote deep thinking, both in classes observed and in the maps themselves. In some classrooms students were actively working together to solve problems or tackle a challenging text, while in other classrooms rote skill practice was taking place for all students.
- Samples of student work seen during the student meeting varied widely, from essays that clearly demonstrated student thinking on social or historical topics, to graphic organizers or basic summaries of simple texts.

Findings

There are some common measures of student growth utilized at the school, while other measures or assessment practices vary.

Impact

While teachers are becoming more conscious of effective use of assessment, their inconsistent application limits teachers' ability to effectively adjust curricula to meet student needs, and also results in uneven levels of awareness by students of their own learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Grading policies vary from teacher to teacher, although in the middle school they are applied more stringently. Some teachers use rubrics to assess student work, while on many examples of other student work there was limited feedback. Students reported that they usually received a rubric with big projects, but several students were unable to explain what they did well or how they need to improve based on the rubric language. One 8th grader described how the class developed their own rubric for a project, while some students said they may receive a rubric following the completion of a project, thus indicating a wide variation in teachers' understanding of the effective application of a rubric.
- The administrative team shared that the use of assessment data to drive instructional groupings is now a clear expectation where it had not been as much so in the past. Nonetheless, the principal shared that teachers "use what works for them" as a means of organizing and disaggregating information to make instructional decisions. While reading benchmarks are taken several times a year, there is no other common assessment that is used to track student progress.
- During the student meeting, a few of the higher achieving students expressed that they are often bored in class. They finish their work before others because they are all doing the same thing, and they know they are doing well because they "finish quickly," and because "the teacher tells them they are doing well." In some classrooms teachers circulated and monitored students progress. Some students were able to accurately assess their next steps while most, particularly in the upper elementary grades, struggled to identify something as a goal or as a strength.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

There are many expectations for students at the school, however not all of them are linked to academic achievement and future success.

Impact

The progress made in improving the school's social and emotional culture has not yet had an impact on the culture for learning and achievement at the school.

Supporting Evidence

- While there are many ways for families to connect with the school, such as Family Friday and volunteering in the classrooms, parents are not always aware of what the school is expecting from their children academically or how they are being prepared for the next level of their education. Parents spoke glowingly of the expectations the school holds for their children around behavior, attendance and punctuality. Similarly teachers acknowledged that a lot of energy has gone in to improving discipline and that often children are rewarded or given consequences based on their behavior, but not as much on their academic achievements. The parent group was not aware of the school's goals for the year, although they did acknowledge that there are newsletters and that students are supposed to read each night. Most parents interviewed are concerned about the lack of in-school and extended day support available for their children.
- While in the past the school had held workshops on the Common Core, as of the date of this review, there had not yet been a parent workshop to help parents understand the kind of work their children are now doing, and there had also been limited introduction to the new curricula.
- Some 8th grade students expressed that they were not sure they were ready for the rigors of high school level work, particularly in writing and math, but they felt confident about having the necessary study habits to succeed. Some students said that they had one-on-one meetings with the counselor about high school selection, while some parents said they did not. When asked about what is expected of them as students at the school, all student responses were linked to behavior or personal character, such as "be dedicated," "be a role model," "be a leader". This shows that while the school's expectations around behavior have been internalized, academic expectations are not necessarily at the forefront