



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 116 Mary Lindley Murray

Elementary School M116

**210 East 33 Street
Manhattan
NY 10016**

Principal: Jane Hsu

**Date of review: May 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

P.S. 116 Mary Lindley Murray is a/an Elementary school with 696 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 9% Black, 21% Hispanic, 44% White, and 19% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 95.2%.

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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

The school has a clear, highly coherent vision of high quality instruction and meaningful learning, reflected upon often at the school and team levels, that is tied directly to the intricate and rigorous demands of the curricula and to the instructional shifts.

Impact

Across all classrooms, teaching practices reflect the school's unified beliefs and the needs of individual learners are met to the degree that the majority of students are producing work that demonstrates high levels of thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has clearly articulated and widely shared core beliefs about how students learn. These beliefs focus on a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, and place a very high value on student independence, choice, and agency. Throughout this review, teachers, parents and students referenced these beliefs and reinforced their commitment to this approach. In every classroom observed, and in the student meeting, students demonstrated high levels of age appropriate independence, supported and guided in their choices by their teachers. To achieve this high level of coherence across their school, the priorities are constantly reflected up and refined by teachers in their meetings and through the professional development they receive, and they are held accountable for this vision by their administration as well as one another. In addition to grade level teams, teachers participate in book study groups, and these study groups have greatly influenced many of the school's core beliefs about student learning. Many teachers cited specific texts that have shaped the way they run their classrooms.
- In all classrooms, there was evidence that teacher had planned with individual learner needs in mind. For example, in one second grade classroom, during independent reading, the teacher placed a "mission" sheet on one student's desk to remind him of his goals, which included choosing and reading his own two books, and "rewarding" him with a drawing break, one of his main interests, when he reached the goal. These kinds of individual supports were abundant in classrooms and supported students of all kinds in different ways, whether with respect to behavior or to give them access in to the curricula.
- In a fourth grade classroom, students were working on a complicated, multi-step math problem. While the whole class was working on the same general concept, the teacher had multiple versions of the same problem. Some students had numbers that were easier to work with, some students had additional steps to ponder and solve, and still other students had the same problem written in slightly easier language. However, the common thread throughout the work was that all children had to engage in debate with one another to solve the problem, and all children had to produce written explanations of how they worked through it. At the culmination of the lesson, all students were therefore able to share their thinking with one another and demonstrate how they accessed the content in a meaningful way. Finally, in another classroom, a student was leading the discussion prior to the class sharing a text. She was in charge of asking the facilitative questions, tracking her classmates' responses, and, with her teacher's support, determining the direction of the conversation.

Area of Focus

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

The school staff has a collective commitment to ongoing professional collaboration, focusing together on meeting the needs of students, and elevating their practice and leadership, both individually and communally.

Impact

Extensive teamwork is a major driving force behind a high level of instructional coherence, teacher practice, and student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The entire school staff contributes to the many structured professional learning teams, as well as participates in informal, self-generated, collegial collaborations. Teams continually tackle major initiatives, such as aligning curricula with Common Core Learning Standards, incorporating the instructional shifts, and targeting individual and groups of students for additional support, enrichment or pedagogical modifications. Inquiry work has also influenced the school's goals, including, for example, a goal around closing the achievement gap for black male students, and increasing the reading levels for struggling early grade students so they can catch up to their peers. The administration is now looking for ways to ensure that, as new work continually evolves, they are able to sustain a focus on previous initiatives and not lose momentum.
- During this review, the third grade team was engaged in an analysis of an on-demand writing task at the start of a unit on fairy tales. Focusing on the students who scored the lowest, they then categorized the precise areas needing re-teaching or a revised approach, and grouped students accordingly. Following that, they generated ideas about how to approach each area differently and agreed to implement some of these ideas, come back next week and assess student growth. They planned to reshape some of the upcoming unit to ensure that the skills and strategies were reinforced. Teachers shared a myriad of ways in which their teaching has improved. One teacher shared her own story of growth around note-taking and conferring, and credited her colleagues giving her many ideas, and allowing her to observe their practice. Upon following up on this with school leadership, they validated that this teacher has deepened her work in this area and they, too, attributed this to her colleagues' support as well as to her own desire to continually learn.
- Every teacher interviewed indicated that they are given many opportunities to practice leadership, formally and informally, both on teacher teams as well as on many committees that influence school practice and policy. This year, the professional development committee has been a major source of the direction of the school's initiatives and teacher growth. Overseen by teachers and heavily reliant upon all teacher's input, they have created many meaningful opportunities for teachers to grow professionally, which in turn has impacted classroom practice, such as deepening the ways for students to reflect. The addition of more structured protocols and opportunities for more training in team facilitation is a next goal for the school in this area.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school's relentless focus on student independence and agency demands high levels of expectation around everyone's contributions to achieving this vision, and school leaders provide a support to students, families and staff in order to ensure their success.

Impact

Clear communication around the unified vision has enabled the school to implement policies and practices that have increased the independence of their students, equipping them with skills that parents believe are not only preparing them for college, but for lifelong success.

Supporting Evidence

- As early as the interview process to obtain a job at the school, teachers are made aware of what will be expected of them. From commitment to ongoing professional growth and reflection, to thoughtful planning, regular communication with parents, and a willingness to foster student independence, expectations are high and communicated not only by administration but by colleagues as well. At the same time, teachers are provided with support, in the form of mentoring, coaching, access to high quality professional consultants, and, new this year, a commitment to their own wellness and health via a resiliency initiative brought in by the principal. Teachers expressed that this initiative, as well as all the support they receive for their professional growth and success, ensures their progress towards their own personal and professional goals.
- A highlight this school year has been the decision to eliminate traditional homework assignments and "rebrand" what students do in the hours after school as a means of preparing them for the kinds of decisions and activities they will be involved with as higher level learners and later, as adults. Stakeholders, including staff and parents, played an active role in the decision-making process. In addition to nightly reading, students choose from a very wide ranging menu of options named "PDF," - "Play time, Down Time, Family Time." In interviewing parents, they were resoundingly and overwhelmingly pleased with this decision, and they link this experience directly to their children's future success. "My son was the kind of student who used to "phone it in," when it came to homework. Now, he begins each week by mapping out his required activities for the week, planning his schedule, and showing a true commitment to his own experiences," shared one mother of a 5th grade student. When asked how students are supported in this when they do not have extensive support at home, the school shared the menu of options, which clearly offered many choices for students that were independent and gave everyone access to experience meaningful play time or down time.
- Since students must document the way they spend their after-hours time, they must hold themselves accountable for meeting their weekly or monthly goals. This initiative supports many of the schools goals and beliefs, particularly around student choice, independence and agency. Everyone interviewed said that the overwhelming majority of students have developed better study habits, are more organized, are more reflective, and produce better work in school. Students themselves spoke about how they believe this will prepare them for the kind of work habits they will need in middle school and beyond.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school implements coherent, integrated and comprehensive curricula in all subjects that are rigorous, reflective of high standards, and provide flexibility to meet the needs of all learners.

Impact

Students are cognitively engaged, must demonstrate their thinking across all content areas, and are being prepared in challenging ways for the kinds of work they will need to do throughout their educational careers.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's beliefs about how students learn best are reflected in their curricular choices and in the way those choices are modified, extended and adapted to meet all learners' needs. The school has long implemented balanced literacy, utilizing the Teacher's College Reading and Writing workshop approach. In math, the school implements the Investigations curriculum, supplemented by work with Math in the City and Learning in Context, to ensure sufficient support for strugglers as well as extensions for those who are ready. These curricula integrate social studies and science, and these subjects are also delivered separately as well, as reflected in planning documents.
- Demonstrating clear thinking and engaging in meaningful problem solving are evident priorities in different aspects of the curricula, such that all students, including students with special needs and English learners, are able to do so. A diverse group of students was represented during the group meeting at this review. Each student clearly articulated the purpose of their assignments, and each student was able to share an example of how they thought about the content of their work. Students talked about adapting well known stories in order to write their own, engaging in debates over the school's homework policy and other school issues such as the condition of the cafeteria, as well as working on individual, interdisciplinary projects in which "each student has the right to structure the text any way they wish, as long as it makes sense and is accurate."
- The fifth grade, as one means of preparing students for middle school, has developed a problem-solving curriculum known as "Community Challenge." During this time, the students from across all fifth grade classes are combined and divided into small groups. Each day they have to complete a different type of challenge, or solve a complicated problem. On this day, they were working diligently to build the tallest structure possible using only marshmallow and toothpicks. The level of thinking was extremely high as students of all abilities contributed their strengths to figuring this out, and then shared their structures and explanations with one another.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school's assessment practices reflect both the school's curricular choices, as well as their deeply held values around student self-reflection and goal setting.

Impact

Students possess a deep sense of ownership over their goals and achievements and view assessment and reflection as essential to their growth.

Supporting Evidence

- Although the school's chosen curricula come with some ready-made assessments, the teachers adapt these to accurately reflect the specific goals they have set for their students. Rubrics and checklists based on those rubrics, in particular, are adjusted and used judiciously so that they can be readily understood by students and parents, as well as used to help them modify instruction. Teachers have extraordinarily clear portraits of their students' levels of mastery. In reading many of the anecdotal progress notes on running records, it was apparent how well teachers know their students as readers, for example. Each student was given an individual tool to support their short term goals, and then given tools to measure their own progress.
- Student self-assessment is central to the school's vision around assessment. A culture of ongoing conferencing and reflection promotes a deep sense of student ownership over their own goals. Based on conferences, teachers work with students to determine next steps, and then students hold themselves accountable for meeting their goals. For example, one teacher shared a template she uses with her students for documenting strategies they are working on, and then documenting how they transform their strategies into habits. Students are articulate about what they have mastered as well as what they need to work on.
- In addition to ongoing conferencing, teachers use tools such as turn and talking, think-pair-share, and paraphrasing and rephrasing in order to check for understanding. Teachers take a lot of anecdotal notes about their students, not only during conferences but during the mini-lesson, small group instruction, and throughout the day. There is high level of honesty between students and teachers, which enables students to acutely understand their next learning step.