



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Mahalia Jackson

Elementary - Middle School 123

**301 West 140 Street
New York
NY 10030**

Principal: Melitina Hernandez

**Date of review: March 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

The School Context

Mahalia Jackson is an elementary-middle school with 561 students from pre K through grade 8. The school population comprises 54% Black, 39% Hispanic, 6% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 23% 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 88.3%.

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	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	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	Proficient
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:	Proficient
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Findings

High expectations are consistently messaged to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DfT), during trainings and other modes of communication. Ongoing feedback to families keeps them apprised of student progress toward a path for high school and college and career readiness.

Impact

Training structures aligned to school leaders' verbal and written feedback offer support leading to shared accountability. Additionally, families have high praise for the support their children receive, resulting in consistent and ongoing feedback that families use to support student success.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate clear expectations via weekly staff memos, written morning messages on the white board in the general office and targeted letters and emails to staff sharing accolades or next steps. Classroom environment walkthroughs providing feedback are conducted to promote common practices across grades.
- The DfT is a reference tool for administrators and staff serving to provide clear expectations for improving and promoting effective teaching practices throughout the school. Newsletters to staff highlight noted instructional practices and trends. School administrators align observational feedback with professional development. For example, the principal focused recent professional development on teachers' ability to check for understanding after noting that this was an area requiring support. There are now follow up visits to classrooms to note growth in this area. Additionally, school leaders have accompanied selected staff members on focused inter-visitations to other schools. After the visits, teachers and school leaders designed a power point presentation sharing best practices with their peers, thus demonstrating a shared level of accountability to learning.
- This principal's bi-weekly newsletters to parents are welcomed. Parents stated there are numerous modes of communication such as emails, phone calls, home visits, face-to-face meetings and monthly calendar reminders. Parents and guardians stated that school administrators are "hands on" and "caring." They especially like that meeting times vary to meet the needs of working parents. A parent handbook sharing academic and disciplinary policies and guidelines is prepared for families. Additionally, parents stated that the workshops on the Common Core Learning Standards, state assessments and other topics are timely and enable them to help their children at home.
- During the parent meeting, participants stated that assessment data is frequently shared with them. Several parents stated that their children had already improved two reading levels, which made them "so happy." Teachers shared curricula expectations during the school's well-attended open house and curriculum night in October. Progress reports are sent home before the release of formal report cards. Parents said that there is a focus on reading and they are encouraged to read at home with their children. As such, they noted that students' reading stamina has increased.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Although teaching practices are becoming aligned to the written curricula and the tenets of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, teachers do not yet consistently incorporate effective questioning and discussion strategies.

Impact

Some teachers ask thought provoking questions but, across grades, teaching practices do not require all students to productively struggle with tasks. This limits the level of student engagement, resulting in uneven levels of participation across classrooms and lost opportunities for students to demonstrate high order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- During a reading lesson, students watched a speech on the smart board. They compared this speech with one given by President Obama to support their understanding of the opinion writing unit debating if multinational aid organizations have a responsibility to provide aid to foreign countries that are struck by natural disasters. Students worked in teams at their tables engaged in focused conversations sharing their thoughts, while citing evidence. This level of student engagement however is not consistent across grades and departments. In other classes, students did not engage in research or use multiple sources to support their understanding. As such, all classes are not equally rigorous and do not require students to think deeply, research and extend their thinking in order to apply their learning to real world concepts in multiple ways.
- In three of seven classrooms, visited teachers posed open-ended questions, which required students to challenge each other's assumptions and allow students to productively struggle with the assigned tasks. In other classrooms, questions and discussions remain primarily between the teacher and individual students and all teachers do not require students to struggle with complex tasks to meet their individual needs.
- School administrators' core belief requires the change from teacher directed lessons so that students assume ownership for their learning. The principal believes that students must engage in high levels of thinking that requires them to analyze and synthesize information while they question the text and each other. This belief system is at the beginning stages of development across grades.
- Across classrooms, students are asked to cite evidence. However, some learning activities are not grade level appropriate or aligned to the curriculum. For example, at the upper grade level, students were asked to identify varied leaves and leaflets. Additionally, student work folders, classrooms lessons and work displayed on bulletin boards, inconsistently demonstrate critical thinking tasks.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

While the English language arts and math curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), school staff members are beginning to align the social studies and science curricula to content standards. Academic tasks across content are not consistently rigorous.

Impact

All learners do not consistently have access to coherently sequenced units of study and tasks do not always cognitively engage high performing learners. As such, all students are not consistently challenged and, at times, have difficulty transferring their learning to new contexts.

Supporting Evidence

- Across content areas unit plans do not consistently demonstrate scaffolds and entry points to meet the needs of all learners, including those performing at the lowest and highest levels. As such, at times, designed tasks do not always challenge high achieving students. In some classrooms, all students are asked to perform the same task although some may display mastery of the concept.
- The principal shared that teachers are expected to use New York City's scope and sequence to plan social studies lessons. Although the scope and sequence depict essential questions, unit plans are not fully aligned and, at times, tasks are not aligned to the essential questions to ensure that they are rigorously sequenced with coherence to state standards.
- In one class, the research project required students to only engage in the lower levels of Webb's Depth of Knowledge such as select a specific scientific compound, tell who invented it and when it was discovered. Additionally, although the social studies curriculum is sequenced across grades, teachers do not follow the sequence and evidence of teachers exposing students to units of study as displayed on the calendar was not consistently noted across all grades. As such, in some classrooms the science and social studies curricula are not aligned to state standards. Consequently, performance based tasks that probe for deep understanding and application of learning do not consistently extend across both content areas so that all students are suitably engaged.

Findings

Teachers align assessments to the curricula and use the data to determine student progress towards established goals.

Impact

Data results help provide an accurate snapshot of students' progress, enabling staff to adjust curricula and instruction and provide students with actionable feedback in order to support their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's assessment calendar reveals that students participate in weekly math quizzes, Go Math and CMP3 end of unit assessments, Fountas and Pinnell assessments four times annually (September, January, March and June), MOSL pre-assessments twice annually and selected performance based assessments. Teachers review results to note trends and make adaptations to curricular unit plans. For example, staff noted that the early grade indicator revealed areas of weakness in numeration skills. Teachers are now employing strategies and school administrators purchased Great Leaps math kits to help build fluency across all grades.
- Teachers use rubrics to provide verbal and written feedback so that students are aware of their progress. For example, written comments such as *"You were able to go back to the articles to cite evidence," "Your opinion is clearly introduced" or "Part A is correct but next time make sure that your graph matches the data,"* provide actionable feedback to students so that they are aware of how well they are performing. Students shared that they like when teachers provide the rubric at the beginning of the assignment. This allows them to know how their work will be judged.
- After common assessments are given, administrators meet with teachers four times annually to engage in data talks. During these conferences, teachers and administrators review class trends and address priority reading and math strategies needed to advance student progress. For example, at the lower grade levels teachers noted the need to add high frequency word drills to homework to support students reading at A-G levels, while at the upper grade levels, teachers noted the need to focus on close reading strategies with small groups of students during extended day and Saturday academy. As such, teachers are identifying supports and making adjustments to meet the needs of targeted groups of students.
- Uniformity of common assessments provides baseline information and ongoing data relative to student performance and progress. Recent Fountas and Pinnell results show that the majority of students increased one to two reading levels thus far. This demonstrates greater gains when compared to the same time-period last school year.

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

Weekly professional collaborations across grades enable teachers to analyze assessment data, student work products and share instructional strategies.

Impact

Grade and department team meetings enable teachers to assume a collective responsibility for improving pedagogic practices and student mastery of applicable learning standards.

Supporting Evidence

- During the fourth grade team meeting teachers reviewed student writing from a recent baseline assessment to note trends, make instructional decisions and share ideas to adjust teaching practices. For example, teachers compared student work products from the initial assessment in September to the one given in January. Using a rubric, teachers noted student gains in voice, grammar and spelling. They however noted that student writing lacked organization. One teacher shared how she plans to integrate student exemplars from Engage NY into an upcoming unit in order to support students in this area.
- Teachers maintain Fountas and Pinnell data on a tracking form to note gains. Teachers have identified 'pushable' students across grades and classes. Teachers review results to plan targeted group instruction based on identified skills that have been mastered and/or identified as lacking. For example, teachers in all grades note the need for continued focus on building students' academic vocabulary across content areas.
- Grade and department teams meet weekly, using agendas and structures such as assigned team roles, to help focus their attention on meeting the goal of accelerating student achievement through improved teaching practices. Teachers across multiple grades and departments stated that their meetings are collaborative, thus allowing them to share strategies and support their pedagogic growth.