



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 126 Jacob August Riis

02M126

**80 CATHERINE STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10038**

Principal: JACQUELINE GETZ

**Dates of review: Nov 14, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

P.S. 126 Jacob August Riis is a K-8 school with 841 students from PK through grade 8. The school population comprises 9.80% Black, 23.20% Hispanic, 10.00% White, and 56.10% Asian students. The student body includes 17.00% English language learners and 15.30% special education students. Boys account for 49.90% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50.10%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 95.80%.

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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

The school has created and adapted rich, cohesive curricula in all content areas that is consistently reflected upon and refined to address the needs of all learners and incorporates ever increasing levels of rigor.

Impact

The school's commitment to analyzing student work and revising units of study to maximize coherency and to meet all student needs has resulted in a seamless educational experience for students that causes them to think deeply, make connections among and between subjects, and prepares them well for the next levels of their education.

Supporting Evidence

- The backbone of the school's instructional work is the constant, ongoing practice of "taking apart and rebuilding" their units of study. Whether in teacher teams or by individual teachers, the iterative practices of collecting information and analyzing student work inform teacher work on a daily basis. When thinking about attainment of standards, they are guided by the question "What does this standard look like in September, in January and in June?" Teacher teams focus on the best way to incorporate the principles of universal design for learning (UDL), often completely rewriting units to improve accessibility. There is a commitment to ensuring that all learners, including those with special needs and those learning English, are challenged equally and given access to tasks that promote critical thinking.
- The entire school is engaged in a self-portraiture study. Every student and teacher begins the year by drawing a self-portrait with purposefully limited instruction and direction. Every four to six weeks, they repeat this task, connecting it to their unit of instruction and being provided with very specific directions or an instructional focus. In doing this work, teachers become better at using the precise language needed to enable students to create a good self-portrait. This carries over in their other academic arenas. For students, they become used to refining and reflecting on their work, and their portraits become more sophisticated over time. Kindergarteners can already see the difference between their September and November portraits, while fifth graders can look back on their whole elementary career and see how they have grown. This practice is used to influence all other reflection and refinement work being done in the school. Since all students can access this work at their own entry point, it provides an authentic tool with which to calibrate student understanding entry point in to other areas of curriculum,
- Curriculum in the middle school is designed to ensure students have coherent access to high level content as well as an inquiry-based experience that is relevant to their lives. For example, all eighth graders take both a Regents level algebra course as well as two additional periods per week of a course in "Math Exploration." In this class, students were studying functions and created "function selfies" for their self-portraits. In addition, they were engaged in activity about plotting distance between two points, and were expected not only to figure out the shortest distance, but to study the patterns, write a rule, defend their rule, and explain how they considered all the other possibilities. In social studies, American history is taught "backwards." Looking at current social and political events, students then study their origins, and trace ideas backwards to see how they evolved. For example, using the context of their Lower East Side neighborhood, students studied gentrification. Using primary source materials, they crafted essays about the pros and cons of gentrification and the role of the Lower East Side in immigration to this country. Weekly, the students hand in reflections on their learning, which will culminate in a full research paper in the spring.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Curriculum embedded assessment fuels the work of constant revision, in terms of both teacher work and practice as well as student work and self-reflection.

Impact

While ongoing curriculum revision is deeply rooted in the analysis of student outcomes and student work, students' own roles in understanding and utilizing assessment and feedback is not as clear and as a result, some students are not yet benefitting fully from the analysis in which their teachers are engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics are in wide, authentic use across all grades and content areas, including the arts. Many rubrics are co-constructed by teachers and students, and students are very clear about the purpose of them and how they are to be used. Certain grade-wide or classroom rubrics remain unclear to some students, and are not as "user-friendly," thus limiting the students' ability to fully realize their potential benefits. A few students in the student meeting struggled to interpret and articulate the particular feedback that had been given to them based on the rubric, but were able to respond to the prompt "What do you need to do better?" indicating a disconnect between the verbal and written feedback that they had received.
- School-wide practices such as the work around self-portraiture creates an expectation of self-reflection and feedback, but the school shares that this is work they are continuing to deepen. These practices were highly evident in the upper elementary and middle school grades but not as clear in the lower grades, where students had not yet developed the understanding or the language around their next steps.
- When asked to talk about the work they had brought with them to the meeting, students' were highly articulate about why they chose those particular pieces and what these pieces represented in terms of their learning. In particular, they shared the school's belief that public presentation is a major aspect of assessment, and that they look forward to having many opportunities to show their best work and be challenged. One student said "In everything we do, we realize we may have to be sharing it out loud. It makes us want to make it the best it can be, so we are proud to share."

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

There are clearly defined, shared beliefs about teaching and learning that drive instructional practice and strongly influence all classroom decisions as they relate to meeting the needs of all students.

Impact

Meaningful, relevant student work products and authentic high level student discourse pervade the classrooms as a result of the deeply rooted vision of best instructional practice that is shared by the whole faculty and staff.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff has been studying the work of Ron Berger, with a strong focus on his text entitled "Ethics of Excellence." Assigning work that "matters," studying examples of excellence, building a culture of critique, requiring multiple revisions, and providing opportunities for public presentation are the five principles of pedagogical practice that stem from this work. These principles guide every conversation about teaching and learning so the school can meet its stated goals of raising the quality of student conversation and written work in all content areas. An example of this is a seventh grade social studies project in which the students were conducting a mock trial. Students easily referenced sophisticated concepts such as ethos, pathos and logos when developing their arguments. Every assignment given is expected to be concretely relevant to students' lives and experiences, and to "matter" to them. This was true in all classrooms, including mathematics, where even the classroom calendar was treated as a "problem" to be developed, critiqued, and used routinely.
- In all classrooms visited, there was a high level of student independence. Teacher's roles in most classrooms as facilitators rather than as givers of knowledge was readily apparent. Students as young as kindergarten were supporting one another in learning how to write different letters of the alphabet. In fourth grade, students were working on personal narratives and were working independently, with the support of the teacher, and in small groups with one another to ensure the model used was being incorporated by each student. The teacher carefully scaffolded this process by ensuring all learners had access to a template designed specifically for their needs. This template gave individual students deep ownership of their narrative work. When asked about how this template was developed, the teacher explained that some students were having trouble "stretching their small moment," and that this gave them appropriate prompts and reminders. They then translated this model in to their own notebooks, resulting in more detailed writing and greater clarity of their "stretched out" small moment.
- The school's beliefs about the value of multiple revisions was very readily apparent during the student meeting. Of the eight students in the group, five brought samples of work with them that clearly showed multiple drafts of essays or repeated "stabs" at solving and explaining complex math problems. When asked about why multiple drafts are important, the students spoke about how they learn something new with each one, how they get and give critiques to one another, and how work is "never really done."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders, staff, parents and students all participate in fostering a school culture that relishes high expectations for current and future achievement, and clearly communicates those expectations as attainable for all.

Impact

Because the whole community is consistent in their level of expectation, the school far exceeds its progress targets and is on a continually upward trajectory in both traditional measures as well as their own measures of student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff in myriad ways, including through the use of Danielson-based observations. Feedback to teachers is provided in 24 hours or less, and is written to model the way teachers should be offering feedback to students. The expectation that "talk" and reflection are at the center of everything related to curriculum and pedagogy is consistent from administrator to teacher, teacher to students and parents, and between and among the teachers and staff.
- In addition to providing an accelerated eighth grade curriculum to all students regardless of achievement level, the school actively prepares students for the next phase of their education. Families report that conversations about applying to high school begin as early as sixth grade and include visits to schools, numerous workshops, and most importantly, the constant refrain from teachers about how the work they are doing will help them prepare for the next phase. For incoming sixth graders, there is a "booster" program that helps them prepare during the summer prior to their entry. Parents are actively involved in many opportunities to experience "public presentation," one of the school's instructional priorities. Some parents shared that as they toured high schools for their children, they were pleased to see that their students currently in middle school were already tackling some of the subjects and concepts being presented on those visits. Parents receive detailed narratives of their child's progress throughout the school year and the staff is widely accessible to students and parents for extra support outside of school hours.
- Parents across all grades and representing each subgroup of students were consistent in their understanding of the school's goals and values, and credited the school with raising their own expectations for their children. For example, when asked what was expected of students at the school, there was a clear reference to the daily and nightly requirements in reading which are taken very seriously by both students and parents. Parents offered a litany of ways in which they have been taught to assist their children with reading, and they all spoke about how the school keeps close track of their child's progress and shares it with them on a regular basis. One parent summed up by saying that reading is "a constant" in the school and that the importance of it is stressed "everywhere, from weekly newsletters home to the school website, at PTA meetings (in multiple languages), and that all parents come to know that 'reading is the core of everything'."

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

Findings

Inquiry-based adult learning that is rooted in problem solving and the deep analysis of student work to improve practice is pervasive in its influence throughout the school.

Impact

The school's belief in having a culture of conversation among the staff has resulted in a dynamic curriculum, a close examination of student work, an in-depth understanding of how to align to standards, and a learning environment for students that is both rigorous and nurturing.

Supporting Evidence

- The second grade team wrote and implemented a unit on letter writing as a means of helping their students begin to understand the art of a good argument. The team decided to closely examine one of the letters written by students who had plateaued in their writing or students who they wanted to challenge further. Each teacher came to the meeting with a few samples. Each teacher contributed and each teacher received feedback from her colleagues. Together they developed an immediate scaffold for one of the students that could be implemented the same day. Teachers expressed that they feel responsible for all of the students even if not in their class, because they "know them so well through their work."
- Every teacher in the school participates in their grade team meeting as well as a study group. Study groups are self-selected and cross-grade, and led by teachers. Grade level meetings have rotating leadership that teachers feel is very empowering and equitable. Administration's expectation is that the adult learning must somehow impact student learning. Examples of topics might include UDL, interdisciplinary curricula, or social and emotional learning. Most teams meet twice a week, but all teachers interviewed acknowledged that when they want more time, all they have to do is request it, and usually they are covered. They believe this shows the value placed on adult learning. In their school's self-evaluation, they stated that a highlight of their school is "sharing." This was evident in the outcomes around curriculum, pedagogy and student culture.
- Because the ongoing analysis of curriculum and student work drives the work of all teacher teams, all the time, teams are democratically run and all teachers have the opportunity to experience leading their colleagues and having their input matter. Teacher unanimously expressed that their voice is instrumental in all matters relating to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.