



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**John H Finley**

**05M129**

**425 West 130 Street  
New York  
NY 10027**

**Principal: Odelphia Pierre**

**Date of review: December 10, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

## The School Context

John H Finley is an elementary-middle school with 501 students from pre K through grade 8. The school population comprises 43% Black, 50% Hispanic, 2% White, 3% other and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.6%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

School administrators are developing structures to communicate their expectations to staff and provide oral and written student progress feedback towards those expectations as well as college and career readiness to families.

### Impact

School leaders are beginning to design training to help teachers establish a culture of learning aligned to their verbal and written expectations. Communication structures help families understand student progress and assist them in preparing students for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal shares her expectations with staff during faculty and professional development meetings. School leaders expressed the expectation that teachers understand each student's entry point in order to support students' continued growth.
- Teachers completed a school developed professional development survey. School leaders review feedback and are designing professional development on Monday afternoons to support their expectations for teaching. The school's professional learning plan reflects varied weekly topics including a focus on parent engagement and vocabulary. Teachers shared that peer intra-visitations are beginning informally amongst colleagues supporting the same grade or department.
- Weekly homework sheets, progress reports twice annually, report cards, phone calls and parent workshops enable staff and parents to exchange ideas and discuss goals aligned to the school's expectations for student success. While parents stated that last school year school personnel provided a workshop to help them better understand the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards, this school year such workshops are in the planning phase.
- External partnerships with Medgar Evers Mentoring Program and City College student-teacher initiative support students' college and career aspirations. As a result, middle school students participate in conversations about their future and school personnel have planned a trip to Medgar Evers College for eighth grade students.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Instructional practices do not regularly and consistently incorporate effective questioning and discussion strategies. Student work products do not regularly reflect rigorous tasks and the use of multiple entry points to support learning across classrooms.

### Impact

Across grades students do not productively struggle with tasks and most teachers do not ask thought provoking questions. 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

- Some teachers are beginning to ask open-ended questions and students in some classrooms are responding to comments from their peers. For example in one middle school class the teacher asked probing questions, students explained their solutions and one student requested further explanations since her answer differed from her peers. However, these practices are not the norm. In most classrooms teachers continue to ask low level questions and discussions are primarily between the teacher and individual students. Additionally, teachers ask multiple arbitrary questions which often do not align to the learning target or lesson objective.
- To meet students' needs, some teachers use scaffolding tools such as process charts to support writing and math. For example, during a writing class, the teacher reviewed specific strategies displayed on a chart and modeled a short response to a prompt. These practices however are not consistent across classrooms. In other classrooms teachers are not yet adept at using exemplars; additionally, student work products do not reflect immersion in a unit of study where students employ research strategies across multiple sources.
- Frequently lessons are teacher dominated with limited quality interaction between students. For example during some lessons students quietly listen to the teacher and rarely interject to pose their own questions or seek clarification. Additionally, although students sit in groups, they do not build on or support each other's learning. In several classes students worked independently and did not converse with each other even when the teacher directed them to work collaboratively.
- Student work folders and portfolios do not consistently demonstrate critical thinking tasks. For example a research project on Hindu and Greek mythology simply required students to summarize basic facts. Although students are asked to cite evidence in class, written work does not provide evidence where students synthesize information, draw conclusions, cite claims or defend their arguments.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

The English language arts and math curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. School staff members are beginning to align the social studies and science curricula to content standards and academic tasks across content areas that are not consistently rigorous.

### Impact

All learners do not consistently have access to coherently sequenced curricula units of study and tasks do not cognitively engage all learners, including those performing at the highest levels. As such, all students are not suitably challenged and do not transfer their learning to new contexts.

### Supporting Evidence

- Although English language arts and math unit plans demonstrate alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), tasks are not well aligned to the instructional shifts. For example in one math lesson students struggled productively to compare ratios and justify their answers. This however is not the norm. In another class the math task displayed on the bulletin board required students to write the definition of content specific words while in other classrooms students complete computational problems and are not required to solve problems that require them to think deeply and explain their thinking or solutions.
- In the majority of classrooms visited, students worked on the same task and teachers did not provide extension activities to support the needs of high achieving students. In one lower grade classroom, all students completed the same language arts skill activity and in special education classrooms with multiple grades, all students worked on the same task. Student work products reflected a lack of differentiation to meet the needs of varied learners including English language learners.
- School leaders stated that they shared the New York City science and social studies scope and sequence with staff. However, across grades, assigned tasks in both content areas do not demonstrate rigorous expectations and alignment to state standards. For example in one class the social studies task required students to reflect on a poem, another asked students to write the definition of content vocabulary while in a third classroom the teacher assigned low level questions from the text to groups of students.
- Social studies and science tasks are not coherently sequenced across grades so that students meet with increasing levels of challenge. Process charts and student artifacts do not reflect immersion in the units of study and daily tasks are not always aligned to the units' essential questions.

### Findings

Although teachers provide common performance based end of unit assessments, during daily lessons they do not regularly check for student understanding of taught concepts and do not consistently make instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all students.

### Impact

Teachers infrequently regroup students based on learning needs and the quality of feedback is not targeted to address students' needs and help them understand their next learning steps so that they demonstrate increased levels of mastery.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use end of unit assessments and they are beginning to review the data to note students' strengths and next steps. However, after reviewing the data, teachers do not consistently note trends and do not incorporate new strategies to reteach skills for mastery.
- Some teachers use English language arts and math rubrics to provide written feedback to students. However, this is not a consistent practice across the school; individual teachers will use a rubric to provide feedback but the majority will not. In many classrooms students' work is devoid of written feedback, while in others, work products are given a numeric score or feedback is limited to phrases such as "great job", "awesome" and "excellent."
- In one math class student groups worked on differentiated tasks based on their needs. This however is not the norm. In most classrooms students sit in stagnant groups and teachers do not use formative data to regroup students or to make instructional adjustments and adaptations to meet the varied student needs.
- Most teachers do not regularly use checklists, take notes or incorporate other structures to assess student understanding. Across classes and grades students infrequently self-assess to reinforce conceptual understanding. Additionally, although teachers repeatedly ask questions, many do not analyze student responses as a check for understanding.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### **Findings**

An inquiry approach where teachers analyze assessment data and student work is at the embryonic stages of development during teachers' professional collaborations.

### **Impact**

Although grade and department teams of teachers meet, they do not regularly assume a collective responsibility for decisions which improve teaching practices and student mastery of identified learning standards.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The principal stated that grade level teams at the elementary level and department teams at the middle level meet weekly. However the development of an inquiry approach is not well defined across teams. Although team members discuss assessment results, their conversation is mainly focused on individual students and they have not collectively identified goals for a core group of students for which they track data results while employing specific strategies to note which are successful and which are not meeting with success.
- Grade and department teams randomly share student work. They do not frequently use protocols to reflect on the implications of formative and summative data results in informing changes needed to their own pedagogic practices.
- At team meetings, teachers do not regularly refine curricula and design improvement plans. At the math department meeting one teacher shared a process chart to help students write constructed math responses and another teacher shared two pieces of professional text. However, although teachers discuss strategies, conversations do not generally involve the design of instructional adjustments to meet the varied needs of students.