

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Bayard Taylor

Elementary School M158

**1458 York Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10075**

Principal: Dina Ercolano

**Dates of review: May 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

Bayard Taylor is an elementary school with 761 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 4% Black, 11% Hispanic, 71% White, and 11% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 95.7%.

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	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 unified, yet highly individualized approaches to pedagogical practice at the school are clearly intertwined and aligned with their rigorous curricula, and purposely differentiated by design to provide meaningful learning experiences for all learners. Student discussions reflect high levels and student thinking, participation and ownership of learning.

Impact

The careful attention paid to meeting every child's needs and the seamless experiences students have at the school results in very high levels of student thinking and very impressive written and oral expression in all the content areas.

Supporting Evidence

- In addition to hearing about the school's steadfastly held beliefs about teaching at the teacher team meetings and from the administration, they were in evident across every classroom visited. Strong convictions around student independence, authentic engagement, meeting every student where they are, and educating the whole child pervade the school. Using a workshop approach as their foundation, teachers across the school run classrooms in which learning is genuinely constructed by the learners while being carefully guided by the teachers.
- This year's instructional focus of deepening authentic student engagement has taken the school's practices in differentiation to even greater depth. In every classroom visited throughout the school, there were scaffolds present for those who needed them, as well as plentiful opportunity for students to expand their thinking and continually challenge themselves. For example, in one first grade classroom, students were learning how to collect data and create ways to share that data. Students were working in groupings of different sizes, depending on their needs. The teacher supported some students while other students worked together using a computer and a document camera to create their graphs. Throughout all classrooms, students had many entry points into the work, whether through discussion, writing, reading or creating. Teachers provided students with individualized tools, such as personal "word walls" or checklists that enabled them to access content. These practices are plentiful and deeply embedded throughout the school, supporting all learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners in meeting their goals.
- In support of the instructional focus, a major initiative this year has been the development of "student led groups." This innovative practice affords all students the opportunity to lead their classroom peers in conversation around topics in which they have become "experts." These student-led groups have become launching points for many very worthwhile and high-level conversations in classrooms. In addition, teacher devised opportunities for rich conversations and high quality work products were observed throughout the school. In one classroom, two students, working in a pair, were having a spirited debate, using sophisticated mathematical language, over the most "efficient way to represent the data." This same degree of thought provoking conversations was observed in the special education self-contained classroom, during which students were given straws of different lengths, and were experimenting with the ideas around which lengths would make it possible for the students to create different types of triangles.

Area of Focus

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

Although every teacher participates in many collaborative efforts that center on improving student outcomes and teaching practice, limited use of protocols at times hinders equitable participation in meetings. Teachers are empowered to lead their colleagues in both formal and informal ways.

Impact

The schools commitment to ongoing learning, curricular and pedagogical refinement, and a scholarly approach to teaching and learning has created a culture of constant improvement in teacher practice and continually raises expectations for the whole community.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers at the school crave constant collaboration and cite everyone's commitment to reflection and learning as one of the main factors behind their choice to work and remain at P.S. 158. Teachers meet regularly for inquiry, curriculum work, and to support one another in improving their practice. In both teams observed, teachers spoke about the value of their collaborative work at helping them align their units to the Common Core Standards as well as the ways this work has changed their teaching, particularly as they embraced the instructional shifts.
- During the first grade team meeting, the teachers were preparing to launch their next writing unit. They were analyzing an on-demand writing task to determine their starting points, both as individual classes and as a grade. They identified numerous aspects of the student writing that needed reinforcement, while also collecting information about those skills students had mastered, generating very significant and meaningful data that they used to help them establish next steps for different groups of students. They also shared different ways they each approach these issues, supporting one another in trying new techniques. In debriefing the meeting, the teachers and principal agreed that perhaps the implementation of more structured protocols might help them strengthen their use of time even more and guarantee everyone's equitable participation. Despite the lack of these protocols, the teachers accomplished meaningful work and each one committed to next steps before the meeting ended.
- Teachers see themselves as leaders, whether they are formally leading a team or coming to the table with ideas. In addition to the professional development committee, which has been a source of significant teacher voice in the school, teachers are encouraged to both express what they want, what they need to learn, and what kind of support they need to achieve their goals. Teachers provide a lot of professional development for one another. In addition, the school is a nationally recognized site for providing training to other teachers using the Teachers' College approach to reading and writing. Teachers are now taking the lead in discussions about ways to bring more support around utilizing social media and other means of incorporating technology in to their classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that rich, rigorous and engaging curricula in all subjects are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subject areas. Curricula and academic tasks are carefully planned and refined over time to meet the needs of all learners.

Impact

All students experience interesting and challenging exposure to content that teaches them how to think, analyze and synthesize, and prepares them for work that lies ahead in the next phases of their education.

Supporting Evidence

- The school takes a highly reflective approach to developing curricula. They are in constant phases of revision, even while executing units of study. They have devoted much time to ensuring that their units of study in all content areas are in clear alignment with the Common Core Standards and incorporate the instructional shifts. This commitment has resulted in curricula that is coherent both vertically, throughout the grades, as well as in an interdisciplinary way. Through their longstanding work with Teacher's College, they have worked to refine their units of study to ensure that there is ample access to informational text, literature, and speaking and listening. Similarly deep work in mathematics has continually elevated the kind of thinking and problem solving in which students engage. Hearing students from across all grades talk about how their learning, in all content areas, has been built from one year to the next, and seeing student work that demonstrated the nuances involved in bringing greater depth to student learning, serve as validation for the work the school has done in this area for many years.
- The school believes that engaging in ongoing curricular revision is the key to constantly elevating the level of rigor while deepening the level of engagement for students. There is abundant evidence, both in curricular documents as well as in the lesson plans of individual teachers, that rigor for all students and coherence are priorities for the school. In their lesson plans, teachers delineate not only what and how they will execute a lesson, but they also identify potential roadblocks for students and pre-plan to address those roadblocks. All students, including students with disabilities and English language learners are exposed to high-level work and are given the necessary scaffolds to meet the standards.
- At the heart of the school's ongoing revisions of curricula is the ongoing use of student work and data to make the necessary changes. For example, during one of the teacher team meetings, the teachers used the work they were analyzing to make immediate shifts in the way they were delivering material for the narrative writing unit. They also shared several examples of ways in which they institute an assessment based instructional model. In mathematics, they came to understand that while their main curriculum allows for powerful problem solving and thinking, some students would benefit from a different approach. Rather than implementing side-by-side curricula, they rewrote some of their units of study in math and infused the techniques and skills that could benefit all students.

Findings

High quality assessment practices are linked and indistinguishable from the way in which curricula are developed and refined and instruction is delivered and adjusted. Student achievement is monitored and centered on ensuring many opportunities for students to self-assess and develop a reflective understanding of their own strengths and areas for growth.

Impact

There is a clear portrait of student mastery based on actionable feedback. Students are self-aware to a very high degree, enabling them to continually raise the level of challenge for themselves under the guidance of their teachers.

Supporting Evidence

- Assessment, curriculum development and pedagogy are linked together in a seamless loop, such that daily instruction is actually the most common form of assessment used in the school. Meaningful rubrics and other tools support student learning. For example, teachers track reading progressions and measure the construction of meaning. Checklists help students know when they are ready for the next level book, providing both students and teachers with important information that helps them both monitor progress and adjust their work. Units of study are supported with pre- and post assessments, as well as with conference notes and anecdotal records that serve as the foundational data used to make the appropriate adjustments.
- The student-led groups developed as a part of the school's focus on engagement are a highlight of innovative assessment practice. Students understand that they are selected to lead a group because self-reflection and teacher's feedback helped them become expert enough in a topic to teach it to someone else. The process by which teachers continually assess their students enables them to determine when a student is ready to conduct a student-led group. In turn, by observing the group led by the students, they are gaining new information about ways to push the leader beyond their limits.
- There is extensive evidence of promotion of self-assessment that drives all of the work at the school. In addition to deeply embedded habits such as "turn and talks" and "stop and jots", students are frequently asked to write their own written reflections and to use these reflections in conferences with the teacher. As early as kindergarten, students are taught to challenge one another and push each other's thinking, asking each other probing questions such as "What in the evidence makes you think that?" As with rubrics and checklists, these habits are built into lessons and reinforced in every available situation.

Findings

The school has a strong culture of learning that encompasses high expectations for staff, students and families and imparts messages around college and career readiness, aspirations and achievement at all levels to the whole school community.

Impact

Students have very high expectations for themselves, families feel very supported by the school, and teachers hold themselves to extremely high standards, resulting in high levels of student achievement and attainment.

Supporting Evidence

- Even as early as the initial interview process, anyone who works at the school is expected to be a learner, a reader, and unafraid to take risks or collaborate. When the principal spoke about the school community, she stated that everyone, students and teachers alike, are engaged in "serious work with joy." This was apparent during both teacher team meetings, in which the teachers on both teams spoke about how they choose to remain at this school because they want to be continually pushed, want to exceed their own expectations and appreciate the fact that they are expected to be lifelong learners. One teacher summed it up by saying "When you work at this school, you need to be the kind of person who actually seeks out help and support, and who understands that getting feedback is not a negative." These expectations are laid out concretely in communications to staff as well as by examples from the administration.
- The school's work in student-led groups has categorically raised the level of expectations for students and families and has become a significant venue for promoting college and career readiness. The entire process of implementing student-led grouping and the steps a student must take to be able to lead a group builds levels of student independence, both for the student leader as well as for the students being led. From crafting the theme or lesson they will be leading, mapping out the session, working collaboratively with the teacher and the other students, to the actual facilitation of the conversation, even very young students are involved in shaping the learning of their classmates. Everything from research skills to time management is a vital part of this process and this initiative supports families in better understanding their child's progress towards expectations.
- Parents spoke at great length about the myriad ways in which the school communicates its expectations to them, both formally and informally. Newsletters, emails, a school website, and regular phone calls home, in addition to progress reports and report cards, are all sources of detailed information about what is expected of their children. However, the main source of understanding around expectations are actually their own children, who come home every day sharing what is expected, and what needs to be done. Parents are clear and exact about where their children stand in terms of performance in reading and math, and they have embraced the school's increased focus on student engagement, noticing a considerable change, particularly around their children's ownership of their own learning.