

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Robert F. Kennedy

Elementary-Middle-High School M169

**110 East 88 Street
Manhattan
NY 10128**

Principal: Susan Finn

**Dates of review: March 26, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Kathleen Lefevre**

The School Context

Robert F. Kennedy is an elementary, middle, high school with 325 students from grade 1 through 12. The school population comprises 43% Black, 50% Hispanic, 4% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 74% special education students. Boys account for 82% of the students enrolled and girls account for 18%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 84.8%.

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.	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	Proficient
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

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts for all learners. Teachers across grades and content areas use student work and data to refine curricula so that all students are engaged in challenging learning experiences.

Impact

The school's strategic curricular decisions result in rigorous tasks and learning experiences promoting college and career readiness for all learners across grades and content areas. Multiple entry points are regularly planned to provide access to curricula and cognitively engage all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- During the principal interview and teacher team meetings, school leaders and teachers articulated how they ensure all curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and other content area standards and how the instructional shifts are coherently integrated across grades and subjects.
- The school's use of Ready Gen and Expeditionary Learning literacy curriculum and Go Math and Connect Mathematics Program (CMP 3) provide students in standardized assessment classes with exposure to rigorous tasks and learning activities aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. A review of curriculum maps show that teachers have identified formative assessment tasks and differentiated learning activities that support student access to an appropriately challenging final performance assessment.
- For students in alternate assessment unable to access the content of the general curriculum, the school has implemented across sites Unique Learning Systems, Attainment, Structured Method in Language Education (SMILE) and Sounds in Motion, resulting in increased curricular coherence and students results as demonstrated by results on Students Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI). Students assessed with SANDI showed overall a 13% increase in reading and a 25% increase in math from Fall 2013 to Fall 2014.
- The school strategically integrates the English language arts, science and social studies curriculum with learning tasks emphasizing the following shifts to enable students to be successful in meeting their goals: writing from sources; balancing informational and literary texts; building academic vocabulary. In math, learning tasks are extended to provide students with opportunities for real world application of skills.
- Teachers across grades and subject areas use student work and data to continuously plan and refine curricula to meet the needs of diverse learners. A review of teacher lesson plans provides evidence of strategic planning to engage all learners using the Universal by Design model of differentiation. Components include differentiated tasks, flexible grouping, leveled readings and books adapted by the teachers, and technology including Smart Boards, iPads, and class-based and individual assistive communication devices. Review of the curriculum by teachers has resulted in the programming of assistive communication devices with vocabulary specific to curriculum units and lessons to provide all students with entry points into the curriculum, as evident in symbols planned to communicate about solutions in science.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Common assessments are used to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers implement frequent checks for understanding, align assessments to the curricula and use rubrics to assess and provide feedback on student work.

Impact

School-wide assessment practices using common assessments, rubrics and checks for understanding enable teachers to refine curricula and make instructional adjustments to meet the learning needs of all students. However, teacher feedback does not always enable students to know what they do well and what their next learning steps are.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of the curriculum maps shows that teachers have identified formative assessments for the units, resulting in coherence in teacher conversations about student progress toward meeting goals. Common assessments across sites and student groups include running records, curriculum unit performance tasks and New York State assessments, EdPerformance Series, Student Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI) and Formative Assessment of Standards Tasks (FAST). These assessments are aligned to standards-based curriculum and assess student mastery of skills and understanding of concepts. Teachers and teacher teams effectively analyze ongoing collection of data in addition to EdPerformance series and SANDI for information about student's progress and learning needs relative to their individual goals.
- Teachers use data about student progress and patterns in incorrect answers, skills gaps and learning needs to inform and support purposeful grouping of students that results in increased student engagement. Across classrooms, instructional grouping showed an alignment between data and the differentiation of curricula and grouping of students, impacting on student access to the curriculum.
- Across classrooms, teachers were observed using a range of checks for understanding, including class discussions, fist to five, conferring, turn and talk, cold call, note-catchers and exit slips. For example, at the end of an English language arts lesson, before having students complete their exit slips, the teacher asked students to use fist to five to show their understanding of each of the learning targets for the lesson. In a social studies lesson, after conferring with a student group about the reasons for immigration, the teacher redirected the group to re-examine the text and accompanying visuals for evidence that would or would not support the reasons they listed.
- Classroom work and student work products in the different content areas shared at the student interviews are scored using rubrics and provided with feedback that tells students their next steps for improving achievement. Students said that the teachers meet with them to discuss strategies they can use to improve their work. In some cases, feedback on the strengths of student work was vague and students were not able to determine what they did well on certain pieces of work.
- Students are aware of and could speak to their goals in the areas of math, reading, writing and behavior. They were able to discuss their progress since the beginning of the year relevant to these areas. Students who participated in being assessed with running records were able to say what reading level they were currently on and what level they were on at the beginning of the year. However, some students were not aware of the skills that each level incorporated, and this had an impact on their understanding of what skills they needed to develop to move to the next level.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers' instructional practices are aligned to the curricula and the school's articulated beliefs about how students learn best, and consistently provide multiple entry points so that all learners can participate.

Impact

Across all classrooms, students are engaged in appropriately challenging learning tasks aligned to the curricula, as informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts and demonstrate higher level thinking in discussions and work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The instructional focus of collaborative learning is a common goal evident in every classroom. Observed teaching practices to promote collaborative learning included carousel brainstorming; gallery walks; think or ink, pair, share; turn and talk; intentional student groupings and world cafe protocol. In a math class, for example, students worked in groups of three to develop charts to be shared with their classmates that used four different strategies to solving their word problem. In an English Language Arts class, students used the gallery walk protocol to build prior knowledge about the golden rule prior to reading a chapter in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This consistent practice across classrooms provides a common language and a set of expectations that all students are provided with opportunities to learn from each other and provide mutual support.
- School leaders have emphasized the importance of vocabulary development, specifically since it supports a high level of student thinking in discussions. Across all classrooms, there was evidence of explicit vocabulary instruction, opportunities for students to complete Frayer models, content specific word walls, and assignments requiring use of the vocabulary they had learned. For example, after reading "Lyddie" by Katherine Patterson, students were asked to write a response to the influences of time, place and culture on the way they and Lyddie experienced the world, using vocabulary they had learned from the text. In the alternate assessment classes, the students completed differentiated Frayer model templates for science vocabulary. Across classrooms, students were able to use new vocabulary words to increase the level of student thinking and explanation in discussions, as observed in a lesson on To Kill a Mockingbird.
- All classrooms demonstrated evidence of strategic questioning to support students in understanding the content. Teachers use the Depth of Knowledge framework to plan in advance the questions for different groups of students. The school-wide expectation of engaging students in questioning sequences by increasing wait time and ensuring that students use their communication devices was evident across classrooms during lessons observed. Across classrooms, teachers challenged students to explain their thinking and defend their answers. In a Social Studies lesson on immigration and Ellis Island, the students were asked multiple times, "Why do you think that?" Students were provided with multiple choice questions and not only had to defend their answer, but also to use evidence to explain why a choice could not be the correct answer.
- Across classrooms, teachers strategically use scaffolds, opportunities for choice, hands-on activities, and project-based learning to create a variety of ways for students to access challenging content and be supported in their learning. In science classes for students in alternate assessment, students had read about high and low pitch and were exploring the sounds different instruments made. Curriculum aligned, project-based learning supported students in understanding concepts related to science for students in both standardized and alternate classes. Students after studying sound in science made musical instruments in woodshop, and students in both standardized and alternate classes participated in study of meal worms.
- Across all classrooms observed, students demonstrated that they were aware of and could follow class routines. Students moved easily between whole group instruction, small group and individual seat work, share time and reflection time at the end of the class. For students in alternate assessment, in all classes visual cues supported student independence and transitions between activities.

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations connected to college and career readiness to all staff, students and families and support them in successfully meeting the expectations.

Impact

There is mutual accountability for student success by all stakeholders around academic, social and behavioral expectations resulting in improved student outcomes and preparation for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders are instructional leaders and have communicated high expectations through parent meetings, team meetings, professional development workshops, peer inter-visitations, observation feedback and memos to staff and parents. The School Learning Environment Survey shows an increase from 94% to 99% in the number of parents who agree that the school communicates what is expected of their children and the academic progress their children are making towards these expectations.
- There are clear norms that support a culture of learning and structures are in place to hold members accountable. New teacher orientation and ongoing support is provided to all first year teachers and teachers new to the school. Expectations for extended Monday professional development are outlined in a memorandum that details a four part cycle study of areas that directly impact student achievement, specifically review of portfolios, review of assessments, content area instruction and classroom inter-visitations using a gallery walk protocol. At the end of each cycle, teachers complete feedback that is reviewed by school administration.
- During the parent meeting, parents spoke to the school's goals of academic rigor in English language arts and mathematics, as well as the school's commitment to the whole child through social-emotional development, including the Positive Behavior Supports Program, club program and advisories. One parent stated that the school is "all about getting their children to the next level, helping them improve in every area and helping them become more independent every day." Parents stated that they were able to turn to the school for assistance in supporting their children in facing new experiences. For example, one parent shared that the school wrote and integrated into the curriculum social stories about going to the dentist. Parents spoke with pride how the school prepares students for less restrictive environments, as evidenced by data that shows an average of over 10% of students moving to less restrictive environments within the school and over 6% moving to community schools, charter schools or the high school inclusion program.
- Based upon interviews, school leaders believe that collaboration among parents, students and staff foster high expectations, academic rigor and appropriate behaviors, leading to a positive learning experience for each student. To encourage the positive learning community, the school has implemented across all sites a comprehensive positive behavior supports systems, KARMA (Kind, Appropriate, Responsible, Mature and Accountable), that teaches and models behavioral expectations and tracks the behavioral progress of the students. An array of programs, including Student Council, Emotional Literacy, Big Buddy Program and Shining Stars, support the high behavioral expectations for the students. As reported in student and parent interviews, the impact of the high behavioral expectations has included transition of students to less restrictive environments including community schools and increased student responsibility for academic and behavioral success. As a result of the school's strong behavioral expectations, there has been a significant reduction in the total number of occurrences from December 2013 through December 2014 with an almost 90% reduction in Levels 4 and 5 occurrences.

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

All teachers are involved in consistently analyzing student work, assessment data, instructional practices and curricula within structured professional collaborations. Established leadership structures and a culture of shared accountability are in place and promoted at the school.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement. Distributed leadership structures have afforded teachers opportunities to build leadership capacity and share in decision-making processes relevant to student learning and achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaborate in professional teams where they analyze student work and data to develop and refine practices within a grade or discipline. In the team meetings observed, teachers used multiple sources of data, including student reading levels, curriculum mid- and end- unit assessments in math and English language arts, student progress toward meeting Individualized Educational Plan goals, and student vocabulary. Curriculum maps, units of study and lesson plans are evidence of team planning aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and highlight the instructional shifts, resulting in curricular coherence across grades and disciplines at all sites.
- Extensive professional learning for staff is shared at teacher team meetings and serves to strengthen pedagogical practices of teachers. School leaders provide time and substitutes for teachers to attend professional development outside of the school; structures are in place during teacher team meetings and Monday professional development for teachers to share what they have learned with their colleagues.
- Teachers develop comprehensive agendas for their team meetings and use protocols to analyze and "learn from" student work. Included in the agenda was a question that had the team members consider the ways that the performance assessment task "did or did not give students an opportunity to demonstrate what they knew." Based upon the discussion at the team meeting, the members considered ways to refine performance tasks to increase understanding of students' selection of multiple choice responses, including responses that identified the correct answer.
- School leaders have distributive leadership structures in place that build teacher capacity and allow teachers to have input in strategic decision making. Unit coordinators meet with the data specialist once monthly to examine trends across the organization and to make academic, social and behavioral recommendations to ensure coherence across sites. School leaders provide teachers with opportunities to develop their skills and become lead teachers for school initiatives, such as Wilson, the debate team, and Get Ready to Learn. Through innovative and collaborative scheduling, the school's paraprofessional collaborative provides paraprofessionals with opportunities to discuss curriculum expectations and students' behavioral and academic progress. Paraprofessionals are able to share best practices resulting in improved student outcomes.