



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

John B. Russwurm

Elementary School M197

**2230 Fifth Avenue
New York
NY 10037**

Principal: Natasha Spann

**Date of review: March 25, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

The School Context

John B Russwurm is an elementary school with 343 students from grade pre K through grade 5. The school population comprises 61% Black, 34% Hispanic, 4% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89.0%.

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	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Administrators consistently convey their expectations to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DfT) and other modes of communication. Feedback and performance updates keep families informed of student progress towards a path for middle school, high school and college and career readiness.

Impact

Training structures aligned to school leaders' verbal and written feedback offer support leading to a clear system of 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

- The principal posts morning messages on the computerized screen in the main office and her email notes to staff continually keep them informed of schedule adjustments as well as her daily expectations. During the daily morning line-up assembly with staff and students, school administrators acknowledge contributions to the school community and provide notification of formative assessment due dates. Memos to staff and the staff handbook inform them of the school's goals as well as describe expectations for their professional conduct with students and families.
- Parents shared that school leaders and staff are readily available to address their concerns. One parent stated that students love their school because there are "no limitations" on the expectations established for them. Another said that the teachers share educational websites with them and are the "best." As evident in feedback on the School Survey report and throughout the parent meeting, families are supportive of the school and stated that staff members are "striving for excellence." They view family involvement as a priority and provide support in multiple ways such as sorting books in the library, helping in the cafeteria and serving as chaperones on school trips in order to reduce the student to adult ratio.
- Grade/class curricula newsletters, the school's monthly family calendar of events, phone calls and face-to-face meetings enable staff and parents to exchange ideas and discuss goals aligned to the staff's expectations for student success, in readiness for middle school and beyond. Student progress reports inform parents of their children's current and expected Fountas and Pinnell reading levels. One parent happily shared that her child's independent reading level has increased from level D to J.
- School leaders share their expectations during classroom visits as well as provide written feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching after formal and informal observations. Differentiated feedback supports are aligned to the identified needs of individual staff members. Staff and administrators engage in instructional rounds where teachers are encouraged to complete written feedback forms after instructional peer visits. The principal stated that she expects teachers to apply their new learning after receiving professional support.

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 respond to comments from their peers when working in groups. For example, in one class students shared the details cited to support their answers and, in another, 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. For example, during one lesson, the teacher repeatedly asked students “What color is the borough on the map?” In another upper grade class, the teacher asked “What season is March?” “What time of year is it?” Teachers rapidly asked low level questions. This pattern of questioning was repeated across classrooms, where discussions are not engaging and are primarily between the teacher and individual students. As such, 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 to support writing and math. For example, in a lower grade classroom, the teachers asked students to complete a Venn diagram comparing producers and consumers. These practices however are not consistent across classrooms. In other classrooms teachers are not yet adept at using writing exemplars and, in observed math lessons, students were not given manipulatives to help solve computational problems. 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, most do not build on, or support each other’s learning. In several classes students worked independently and did not converse with each other.
- Student work folders and portfolios do not consistently demonstrate critical thinking tasks. For example a social studies report simply required students to list the geographic features of Asia, while there were several reports summarizing basic factual details about famous women posted on hallway bulletin boards. Although students are asked to cite evidence in class, written work does not provide evidence where students consistently synthesize information, draw conclusions, or defend their arguments.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The English language arts and math curricula are aligned to the common core learning standards, however faculty are beginning to align the social studies and science curricula to standards. Academic tasks across content areas are not consistently rigorous.

Impact

All learners do not consistently have access to coherently sequenced curricula 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

- 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 did not understand the task and struggled to simplify fractions. In another class the math task displayed on the bulletin board required students to read and write fractions, 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.
- Lesson plans from the observed classes do not consistently emphasize rigorous habits and skills. For example, the task in one lesson plan required students to write inferences. As noted in another plan, although the teacher included differentiated low level tasks for groups of students, the plan, as written, was not executed. Displayed student work products both in and outside the classrooms reflected a lack of differentiation to meet the needs of varied learners, including English language learners. Additionally, students performing at high levels are not given challenging tasks or enrichment activities.
- 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 upper grade class, the science task required students to tell how caring for their gums and teeth help them stay healthy and look their best; in another class the social studies task required students to complete a KWL graphic organizer and draw a picture of a suburban community, while in a third classroom, the teacher assigned low level questions (e.g. What was the March on Washington like to participants?) 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.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teachers use rubrics inconsistently to provide written feedback. They do not regularly check for student understanding of taught concepts to meet the needs of all students.

Impact

The quality of feedback and assessment practices in all classrooms are not targeted to address students' needs and help them understand their next learning steps so that they are able to self – assess and demonstrate increased levels of mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, although lesson plans reflect tiered groupings, teachers do not frequently regroup students based on learning needs. Additionally, students' work products frequently lack written feedback and, when provided, the quality in some classrooms is not consistently targeted to ensure that students exceed performance standards. Comments such as "You did excellent work" and "Continue to focus more" reflect examples that are not specific and do not inform students what they need to do in order to increase their level of performance.
- Students are aware of their Fountas and Pinnell reading levels and targeted goals. However, although students know that their reading levels have increased and are able to verbally articulate their next steps in reading, they are unable to do so across all content areas.
- Most teachers use English language arts and math rubrics to provide written feedback to students but the use of rubrics is not a consistent practice across all subject areas. In some classrooms and content areas, students' work is devoid of written feedback; some students shared that, in some classes, they receive the rubric after the teacher grades and return their work. This limits students' ability to have a clear understanding of how their work will be judged or to fully understand their strengths and next steps so that they can support their own learning.
- Some teachers are beginning to take notes when they confer with students. However, this is not the norm for all staff. The principal shared that she created a form so that teachers can record which students require re-teaching or additional support. This however was only evident in one teacher's lesson plans. Many teachers do not regularly use checklists or incorporate other structures to assess student understanding. In addition, although students in one class complete metacognition charts after completing reading assignments to reflect on the work, this is not a consistent practice across the school.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
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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 meet weekly. There are daily common planning times across grades enabling teachers to meet informally in addition to the weekly formal team meeting. 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 teams randomly share student work products. During the observed team meeting, teachers reviewed mid-level student writing samples from a recent Rally assessment. Although the teachers have assigned team roles (facilitator, timekeeper etc.), and used a task analysis sheet to note their observations, 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 fifth grade team meeting, although the task was aligned to the writing standard, with a focus on students' command of evidence and their ability to develop a topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, the team's conversation revolved around students' use of transitional words. One teacher stated the need for a graphic organizer to support students. However, although teachers discuss strategies, conversations do not generally involve the design of instructional adjustments to meet the varied needs of students.