

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 198 Isador E. Ida Straus

Elementary School M198

**1700 3rd Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10128**

Principal: Nancy Emerick

**Dates of review: May 1, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

P.S. 198 Isador E. Ida Straus is an elementary school with 462 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 14% Black, 31% Hispanic, 40% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 93.2%.

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.	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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

Findings

The school has put forth tremendous effort to transform its culture into one of high expectations that are shared by students, parents and faculty.

Impact

A culture for learning and a system of accountability now exists and all stakeholders are focused on ensuring that students can reach their goals and are prepared for the next levels of their education.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have placed great emphasis on sharing a vision of high expectations that the staff has embraced. From the start of the year, when the whole staff was involved in re-crafting the school's mission and vision, to the weekly newsletters, near daily emails, and comprehensive staff handbook, there was clear reinforcement of the messages of professionalism and the urgency to have high expectations for students. A primary vehicle for the reinforcement and support of the school's expectations is the vertical team of teachers and staff, whose communication and training of colleagues has increased the sense of mutual accountability at the school.
- Parents and students each spoke at length about how the school has made the path to college and career the clear goal to achieve. Parents are invited in for a Family Friday once a month, in which they are introduced to and participate in a classroom lesson designed to help them better understand what is being required of their children. An online program used by most teachers enables parents to stay closely connected to the classroom in between these visits. Parents are also asked to sign every test that goes home.
- Clear expectations about behavior, attendance and punctuality are connected directly to success in school, now and in the future. Grade 5 students shared essays and other writings that detail their reflections as they anticipate leaving the school in a few months. They shared that the school has prepared them for the next level of their schooling by making them more independent over these last few months, and by holding them more accountable for their own performance in school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

The school is implementing new curricula that they believe will better engage their students and will provide access to all learners, but coherency is developing at this time.

Impact

There is currently a lack of consistency with respect to the level of rigor and with opportunities for students to develop higher order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has adopted two new literacy curricula, Core Knowledge for grades K to 2 and Expeditionary Learning for grades 3 to 5. While it is still too early to fully evaluate the impact of these new curricula, teachers are reporting an increase in reading levels. In addition, the school is in its second full year of implementation of Go Math. Previously, the school lacked clear curricula for social studies and science. Currently, the school has implemented a scope and sequence in social studies, and artifacts from that were evident in some classes. Science, however, is not yet as developed, and parents and students would each like to experience more science on a regular basis and in a more rigorous way. The music program is a highlight. Students are learning to write their own music using the appropriate tools and language.
- Curricula are being implemented inconsistently across classrooms. Some teachers are successfully adapting to meet the needs of their learners, particularly in the gifted and talented classrooms, where teachers shared that the curricula as written does not offer enough of a challenge. The school has a very wide array of learners, and adaptations for English language learners and students with disabilities are not an integral part of classroom practice at this point. While there are some classrooms in which high quality thinking was displayed, many students are not being pushed to think deeply throughout the school. For example, in one kindergarten classroom, students were being guided by the teacher in the construction of a class graph. They relied on one another to define terms, make decisions about the data points being included in the graph, and to defend their decisions and choices. In a number of other classrooms and grades, students' experiences were much more teacher driven and comprised of rote tasks that did not require complex thinking.
- Evidence of essential questions and aspects of Universal Design for Learning are present in some classrooms and in some curriculum documents, for example, in the social studies scope and sequence. For the most part, the relative newness of the curricula has meant that as yet, not all students experience cognitive engagement at levels that are appropriate for their learning needs. Teachers are currently delivering the curricula, for the most part, "as is," and have not yet reached a level of comfort with it that will enable them to make learner specific adjustments.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

While there are some classrooms in which teaching is highly engaging, motivating and promotes high levels of student thinking, practice is inconsistent across classrooms as the teaching staff continues to work towards a common understanding of how students learn best.

Impact

Student work products, levels of student autonomy, and the meeting of individual student needs vary widely, resulting in a lack of coherent classroom experiences for students across the grades.

Supporting Evidence

- In speaking with teachers, most of them recognize that some of the important practices they have employed in the past have been minimized during this year of transition. For example, they recognize that although the new literacy curriculum does incorporate some of the instructional shifts, some past practices regarding the integration of writing, or an inquiry approach to the teaching of science or social studies, need to be revisited. As a result, many teachers are engaged in an ongoing process of trying to ascertain exactly what works best for their very diverse student population and the school is grappling with their beliefs about how students learn best.
- Classrooms vary with respect to providing appropriate entry points for all learners and with the promotion of higher order thinking. For example, in one grade 2 gifted and talented classroom, evidence of higher order thinking abounded. The teacher was facilitating, through the use of carefully devised questions, a whole class conversation regarding the text, in which students respectfully challenged and pushed one another's thinking and used high level academic language to support their arguments. Abundant process charts that were highly interactive showed evidence of ongoing inquiry related to science and social studies themes. There was a high level of engagement and many opportunities for students to interact with complex concepts and texts. In some other classes, students were considerably less engaged, for example, copying definitions of words out of a glossary, or engaged in a shared reading in which the text was too hard or too easy. Throughout many classrooms, there was little differentiation apparent for students with disabilities or English language learners.
- Levels of student autonomy, participation and thinking are inconsistent. Although some classrooms encourage an "ask three before me" policy, in some classrooms students are sent to their group work without sufficient guidance or instruction and do not seek assistance. In some classrooms, mini-lessons were dominated by the teacher's attention to just a few students on the front of the rug. Student work products reflect the inconsistency in instruction, with some students producing prolific work while other students' notebooks showed minimal writing or evidence of content area work.

Findings

There is some quality assessment practice beginning to take place, but as yet assessment is not used to its full potential to modify and adjust instructional opportunities for students.

Impact

Some students are able to reflect and express their own goals, needs and strengths, but most students do not have a clear picture of what they do well and why, and assessments are not used consistently to enable sufficient differentiation in the classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- There is some use of rubrics developing throughout portions of the school, but there is not yet a normed understanding of grading that consistently informs these rubrics or how students are assessed. It is not always clear to students how they are being assessed, or what is expected of them prior to beginning a task. Indicators on rubrics are frequently circled with no additional information.
- The school's chosen curricula in literacy and mathematics provide ready-made assessments for teachers to use. These assessments are typically administered following a unit of study. Often these assessments, as well as the common administration of running records, are used to determine which students require intervention, and the school's Response to Intervention team has been instrumental in supporting some of the neediest students. The school is very proud of the work it has done to train paraprofessionals to support struggling students as a result of this work. However, classroom level adjustments to instruction and team level adjustments to curriculum are not consistently made based on assessment information, and as a result, much instruction is not sufficiently differentiated to meet student needs.
- While the school has increased its level of expectations, one area that has not fully developed is that of student ownership of their own work and their ability to self-assess. Some teachers do ask students to reflect on their work, but students shared that it is not often followed up with goal setting or a conversation with the teachers about their next steps. For example, several students shared writing pieces they had worked on. Some students had multiple drafts and received a lot of feedback from their teachers, while other students reported that they were just to publish following a check for spelling errors. In classrooms, conscious practice around checking for understanding is minimal. In most classrooms, teachers asked questions such as "Does everyone understand?" or "Raise your hand if you don't get it." In a few classrooms, teachers asked students to paraphrase, repeat or clarify concepts for their classmates.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The structure and productivity of the teacher teams have improved over time and have begun to have a positive impact on curricular planning and the contribution of teacher voice to important matters in the school.

Impact

A culture of collaboration is starting to emerge that is advancing the use of common language and a common set of beliefs about how students learn.

Supporting Evidence

- There has been a major shift in the role and function of the teacher teams. Every teacher agreed that the teams have come a long way this year towards promoting richer, more meaningful collaboration, and that the teams have become more focused on affecting student outcomes. In past years there was not as clear a focus on the idea of focusing on a target population of students and the instructional focus. Using the school's instructional focus as a primary lens, teams this year have been working together on ways to improve outcomes for students. During an observation of the grade 3 team meeting, this was readily apparent as they viewed a video of a student who had difficulty expressing her thoughts. Together they brainstormed many ideas for the classroom teacher to implement as she works with this child. The principal recognizes that a next step is for teachers to also use this time as a means of reflecting on their own practice and to hold one another accountable for collective improvement.
- Each team has been working on the best ways to improve speaking and listening skills for all students. Teams have engaged in videotaping, observing and helping one another enrich these skills across the grade levels. Much time has been devoted to unpacking the new curricula. Not as much time has been devoted to analyzing assessment or reflecting on individual teacher practice. While every teacher acknowledged the benefit of focusing on student improvement, and was able to cite specific examples around students in their class who have made gains, several teachers struggled with the question of how their work in teams has explicitly changed their own practice. This reflects the developmental stage of inquiry and team work at the school at the current time.
- Shared leadership and opportunities for teachers to practice leadership is starting to grow in the school. Two teachers participate in the Teacher Leadership Program and have begun to bring helpful practice in protocols back to the school. At team meetings, teachers take turns rotating roles, such as setting the agenda and facilitating the meetings. There are many committees on which teachers have a significant voice, although some teachers expressed that they would like to see more people have an opportunity to contribute their voices to school matters. Teachers would also like to be given more opportunities to turnkey the professional development that they receive to one another.