

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The River School

Elementary School M281

**425 East 35th Street
New York
NY 10016**

Principal: Jessica Orleans

**Dates of review: April 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

The River School is a/an Elementary school with 104 students from PK through grade 5. The school population comprises 6% Black, 13% Hispanic, 42% White, 38% Asian and 1% Other students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 93.3%.

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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

3.4 High Expectations

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The principal has established supports and created an environment that promotes high expectations for teachers, students and parents via ongoing feedback that promotes an outlook towards college even in these early years of their education.

Impact

All stakeholders, including parents, are now equipped to maintain and sustain high expectations and are poised to grow the school in the coming years.

Supporting Evidence

- The new principal and her staff have, in effect, rebuilt almost of all of the internal structures and systems of this second year school, resulting in a clear vision of expectation for the whole community. Beginning with the staff, the principal has placed a great emphasis on expectations for classroom teaching and professionalism, and has used her expertise in implementing the Danielson Framework for guiding those conversations. This has enabled the core group of founding teachers to establish a common language with respect to instruction and professionalism. In addition to sharing individual feedback with teachers, the principal has also created a written forum to share the trends and patterns she is seeing across the classrooms, as well as posting "The River Review" weekly in the main office, which highlights successes taking place in the school.
- The school recognizes that the expectations that are set forth now, in the school's very early years with early grade students will shape the school for years to come. As such, they have created several rituals, routines and systems that have already become crucial hallmarks of their values and ultimate goal of college readiness. For example, throughout the school, each classroom utilizes a "River Ready?" system for encouraging not only behavior but also a learning stance. Kindergarten and first grade students are already regularly referring to themselves as "River Role Model," "River Ready," "River Reviewer" or "River Reflector" to describe their readiness to participate and learn.
- The staff communicates extensively with parents and with students about their progress. In addition to weekly notes that go home to families, teachers also write notes to students, that highlight, "The River School is Radiant about (student's name)". These notes emphasize the positive behaviors, as well as the academic accomplishments they have made. The school has ritualized note writing in many ways, including having staff write to one another, parents write to their children, and children write to their parents and teachers. It enables children and teachers to think about the ways they have grown and improved, while setting new goals for growth as they improve.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Staff has begun the process of creating and implementing curricula that emphasizes key standards and the instructional shifts, and ensuring that tasks and curricula are rigorous and engaging enough for their diverse student body.

Impact

While a foundation is being built in literacy, curricula are still being developed and require further refinement to fully support all learners including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs).

Supporting Evidence

- With the assistance of a consultant, the mostly novice teaching staff has begun to develop curricula and a scope and sequence for the current grades in the school - pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grades. They have identified some big ideas and understandings that students in these grades should have, based on a balanced literacy approach. In math, they are also utilizing aspects of both the Investigations curricula as well as Engage NY materials. An inquiry study is integrated throughout each unit, which provides some foundation in social studies or science and is intended to promote deep, rigorous thinking around a topic. In addition, they have implemented a STEAM class - science, technology, engineering, arts and math.
- Curriculum documents and classroom visits reveal that rigorous habits and higher order thinking are as yet not fully consistent across all classrooms and in all subjects. Math lessons that were observed showed that teachers were trying to push thinking via the complex tasks they were having students do, as well as the differing tasks for a variety of levels. Rich, individualized literacy work and work in other content areas is still being developed.
- The school has a large percentage of ELLs relative to its very small size and early stage of development. While there has been a concerted effort to meet the needs of these students with extra assistance, the curricula are not yet in a place where modifications are built in or integrated as a matter of course. The inquiry studies provide multi-dimensional ways for students to access information but there is not yet a full, cross curricular inclusion of adaptations for all learners.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

In these early stages of the school's life, the staff is co-creating a vision of practice that reflects their beliefs about how their growing and diverse student body learns best and produces high quality work that is heavily influenced by the Danielson Framework.

Impact

Instructional practice that is fully effective for all students is not yet consistent but is often reflected upon to ensure improvement.

Supporting Evidence

- As curriculum continues to develop, best practice towards implementation does as well. The school currently states their instructional focus for student learning as "ABC," which stands for "Actively Listening," "Brightly Thinking," and "Clearly Speaking." This focus was crafted with alignment to the Danielson Framework in mind. While In some classrooms these expectations were reinforced by teacher prompts, charts, or public celebration of examples of students engaging this way, it is not fully developed as a vision across the school for every grade, in every classroom.
- Currently the school has only five classes. In some classrooms, it was clear that meeting student needs was at the forefront of teacher planning. For example, in one kindergarten classroom, the whole class was studying the same basic concept, and practicing ways to make the number 8. However, some students were working independently with manipulatives, others were working with a paraprofessional using visual aids, while another group worked with the teacher to slowly and deliberately practice together until they could do it independently. The teacher continually "upped the ante" by changing the criteria and the available tools students could use. In other classrooms, however, a number of students did not appear to be challenged, reading texts that were too easy for them, or not having a follow up task once they completed the given assignment. During the student group, the children had widely varying perspectives on their experiences thus far. Some students were very familiar with the big ideas they were learning and could easily articulate why they are learning it. They spoke clearly about their writing and reading work, in particular, sharing their stories and the books they have read. Others were not as clear about their learning, and shared that they spent too long on the rug and were sometimes not challenged enough in math.
- Accountable conversation has been a heavily emphasized strategy this year. In the pre-kindergarten classroom, these very young students were engaged in a lively conversation about growing up, and were comparing and contrasting being a baby, versus being a child, versus being a grown up. Similarly, in the math class described above, students were expected to challenge one another's thinking.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Although the school utilizes multiple forms of assessment to track the progress of individual students, the school is still developing expertise in how to ensure full alignment to curricula and use the assessment data to inform decision making both on-the-spot and longer term.

Impact

As yet the school does not consistently utilize the various assessments to effectively modify curriculum or instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has begun to develop a variety of tools, such as rubrics and checklists, to provide students and parents with feedback. Kindergarten students are able to articulate what a rubric is and why it is used, but the language on the rubrics is not always in terms that enable them to understand their next learning steps. They do, however, understand that is a tool that will help them make their work better. Some rubrics, as they currently exist, are intended to help the teachers and parents analyze their students' work products. Other rubrics, such as the school wide accountable talk rubric, are used by all in order to develop an expectation around student conversation.
- The school utilizes many assessments. The self-evaluation highlighted 12 different types of students. They utilize a common template to take conference notes or to jot observations about students that identify key noticings, both strengths and areas for improvement. Some teachers utilize exit slips to capture information from a lesson or a series of lessons.
- Teachers are becoming more skilled at using assessment to make in-the-moment decisions about how to support a student. They utilize a common template to take conference notes or to jot observations about students that identify key noticings, both strengths and areas for improvement. Some teachers utilize exit slips to capture information from a lesson or a series of lessons.

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

Every teacher is committed to meaningful collaboration and there are many opportunities for this novice staff to practice leadership and take part in key decisions.

Impact

This core group of founding teachers has been responsible for developing curricula, creating school culture, and working together to figure out what the school's overall vision will be.

Supporting Evidence

- As a new school with a very small staff, every teacher and all support staff embrace the opportunities to work with and learn from one another. Together they have worked alongside the new principal to make a lot of decisions about how their school will approach academics, behavior, school culture and systems for improvement. Through the course of this year, the collaborations have focused on different things as they planned and refined many aspects of their school. They are now focusing much more on using student data to make adjustments, as well as reflect on their own practice.
- During this review, the teachers utilized a tuning protocol to evaluate how their students were progressing towards meeting one of the school's goals of making thinking visible. One teacher shared video that she took of a two students, an English learner and student with disabilities, sharing their ideas about a math problem. The team analyzed the video and made many suggestions to the teacher about how she could work with these children going forward. Teachers emphasized the important role that working together has played in their development of a community, curricula and improving their own practice.
- Both because of the small size, as well as the collaborative spirit, teachers at the school take on many roles, formal and informal, and have many opportunities to lead one another in work. In addition to several important committees, teachers also participate in the Professional Development team and facilitate for one another in engaging around instruction and pedagogy, assessment, building character, and enhancing school culture and community. The principal encourages, expects, and relies upon the teachers to create the school they wish to work in and the ways in which they want to support students and families.