



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Louis F. Simeone

Elementary School Q007

**80-55 Cornish Avenue
Queens
NY 11373**

Principal: Sara Tucci

**Date of review: March 31, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Shirley Wheeler-Massey**

The School Context

Louis F. Simeone is an elementary school with 1,054 students from grade kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 1% Black, 35% Hispanic, 1% White, and 63% Asian students. The student body includes 61% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.0%.

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	Proficient
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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Teacher leaders facilitate inquiry-based professional collaborations to methodically analyze student work, assessment data and teacher practice.

Impact

The analysis of classroom practices, assessment results and student work by teacher leads have resulted in improved pedagogy and student writing across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers within and across grades meet in various teams such as the performance task team that analyzes data from the New York City Performance Assessments, another team that focuses on developing visual thinking strategies to increase students' oral language, as well as a team that meets to devise ways to further support and improve their English language learners (ELLs) writing skills. The various teams' utilize The Inquiry Cycle from The National School Reform, which guides their work in analyzing student writing, assessment results, as well as thoughtful examination of their practices, in order to develop strategies and monthly foci to address gaps in student learning.
- As a general practice, the performance assessment team analyzes data from the school-wide performance assessments to identify trends across the school and to develop monthly foci and strategies to address the gaps in learning across the school. In observing this team's inquiry work, teacher representatives from each grade and different content areas, presented student work and data from their grade which focused on the rubric traits that they saw growth and continued areas of struggle. Teachers discussed the trends identified within their analysis and discussed different strategies that they can employ to further support their students' writing. Each grade representative devised a monthly focus, plan of action and strategies for their grade, which was agreed upon by each team member.
- Teachers shared that writing has been one of the main foci for their team based on their ongoing analysis of their students' writing, which led them to move from the ReadyGEN writing program to the more rigorous Teachers College writing program. Teachers articulated with the strong emphasis on writing and the sharing of strategies across the grades, they have seen significant progress in student writing, where their first grade students have demonstrated an increase from the baseline performance writing assessment administered in the fall, to the most recent assessment, where there was a jump from 109 students at levels 3 and 4, based on their assessment writing rubric, to 218 students who are now at levels 3 and 4. The belief is that their collaboration has also strengthened their capacity and improved their teaching of writing through the sharing of different approaches across the grades and content areas.
- Teachers expressed that their voice is valued by school leaders, as they drive the work of the school on these teams and have a say in making critical curricular and instructional decisions. One example of this is when they shared their analysis of their kindergarten and first grade students' assessments and noticed they were struggling with phonemic awareness. Teachers expressed a need to go back to using Foundations, another phonics program, which administrators consented to in order to address their students' struggles.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teachers utilize a variety of assessments to track student progress through ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessments; however, the school is working on ensuring the transparency of data results with all students.

Impact

Teacher analysis of various assessment sources, including students' self-assessments has led to curricula and instructional adjustments to meet all students learning needs. However, students are not always fully aware of their next learning steps based on the findings of such data.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, individual teachers and teacher teams track and disaggregate data from common assessments from Fountas and Pinnell running records, New York City performance assessments, interim assessments, Go Math! beginning of year, mid-year and year-end assessments in a variety of ways, such as within assessment binders for whole class and individual students, within graphs and charts that outline the progress or lack thereof of general education students and all subgroups across the school and by each grade. Teachers utilize such data to develop monthly foci for their classes, set goals with their students and make adjustments to curricula based on data analysis. For example, based on the analysis of third grade mid-year reading assessments and common errors identified in their item analysis of last spring's New York State English Language Arts assessment results, teachers decided to focus on reading standard 2, to provide more support on determining central themes, lessons and messages using key details within a variety of fictional text.
- Through the use of formative assessments, running records and writing task, teachers develop student groups within their classrooms to provide targeted instruction, along with academic tasks that support students' individual learning needs. Students expressed that they often work in small groups based on what they know and need more help with. During a visit to one third grade classroom, the teacher shared that students were working in their small groups based on the outcome of a previous writing assessment and were either assigned to engage in independent research, receive more support with one of the teachers in the classroom on using transitional words within their writing, working on RazKids, an on-line reading resource on their laptops or completing other assigned writing tasks.
- Within classrooms visited, teachers checked for understanding using a number of strategies such as Popsicle sticks, circulating to individual and small groups, asking questions to determine student understanding, as well as having students share out ideas from partner or group discussions. Additionally, students are using different self-assessment tools to reflect on their own work and in some instances, provide feedback to their peers on their writing. While opportunities exist for students to set goals, self-assess or reflect on their understanding of content, they are not fully aware of their next steps for learning based on the feedback from teachers and from the reflection of their work. In meeting with students, students were not able to explain why they were provided certain goals, what certain aspects of the rubric and checklist meant or what they needed to do to improve to get to the next level.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school effectively aligns its curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and ensures the incorporation of the instructional shifts. Teachers utilize student work and data to plan and refine curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

School-wide curricular decisions have allowed for coherence across grades and a focus on college and career readiness for students. The planning and refinement of units and academic tasks based on students' specific needs, has provided them access to learning opportunities in which they are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades, teachers are using adaptations of the ReadyGEN and Go Math! programs to ensure students are exposed to the instructional shifts, such as close reading activities, building fluency in reading and math, a balance of fiction and non-fictional text, making real world connections across content areas and developing students' oral language. The school also aligns its social studies and science curricula to the core scope and sequence and utilizes additional resources from the Foss Science program and Eduplace.com to support social studies unit plans. Across content areas and grades, teachers are also utilizing a host of resources to further support the needs of students through anchor texts, various graphic organizers, manipulatives for science and math and real world connections through literature and texts such as in the grade 3 reading unit "Living Through a Natural Disaster" and "Supermarket" to support one of the first grade writing units.
- Unit plans and teacher's daily plans include essential questions, a focus on academic vocabulary, listening and speaking skills, as well as a variety of assessment tools to monitor student learning. Most lesson plans outline specific questions aligned to the lesson focus and essential questions, opportunities for small group support and differentiated tasks to meet the needs of all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, as well as scaffolded instructional tools to support and engage all students during lessons. For example, in a third grade lesson plan, the teacher included opportunities for students to receive support by working with a partner to dissect a small section of the story about Paul Bunyan and alternate between partners to summarize individual sentences to ensure students were able to get the gist of the text.
- Within teacher teams, teachers are using the analysis of student work and data to make decisions regarding the modification and refinement of curricula and unit plans. For instance, during the analysis of earlier performance based writing assessments, teachers on the Performance Task teacher team, decided it was necessary to provide students with more instructional writing support based on common gaps and trends that surfaced in student writing across the school. In consultation with administrators, teachers moved from solely using writing units provided within the ReadyGen literacy program and are now incorporating Teachers College writing units, instead of those originally offered within their reading program, to provide more targeted and differentiated writing lessons to their diverse learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities. Some teachers have also lengthened writing lessons to three days to ensure students have a deeper understanding of tasks and so that all students are engaging with tasks at their appropriate levels.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, there is a shared understanding of how students learn best which is aligned to the school's curricula, is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and provides opportunities for critical thinking and discussion.

Impact

Common teaching practices that include higher quality of questioning strategies have required students to demonstrate increased levels of thinking in their discussions and work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Within classrooms visited, there was evidence of the belief that students learn best through the demonstration of content by teachers within mini-lessons, providing opportunities for students to “try it out” through independent or group tasks, along with the monitoring and assessment of student understanding, using a variety of strategies. Of the classrooms visited, most students were provided opportunities to engage in meaningful turn and talks, small group discussions around the content and engage with tasks that allowed them to demonstrate their understanding of the content. For example, in a second grade classroom, students worked in small groups, as their teachers used different examples to model how to create line plots, before having them practice the skills on their own. As students worked on the various problems, they shared and discussed within their groups, how they would create the plots and the strategies they would use to do so and why. During small group practice, the teacher visited the groups and required students to explain why they stopped at a given number and to describe how they created their various line plots.
- Across classrooms, students were able to articulate with a partner or within groups their ideas, such as strategies to solve problems, their opinions on the peers' work, and how certain strategies would improve their writing. For instance, during a third grade writing lesson, students were engaged in various stages of the writing process, with some, assessing their partners' writing and providing different strategies they could use to improve their work. During partner discussions, students were observed referencing previously learned writing strategies, such as including more descriptive language and more specific evidence to enhance the quality of their persuasive essays. The teacher followed up the students' partner discussions, by asking students, “How will you use the information shared to improve your paper?”, and “Explain how your partners advice was helpful or not helpful”.
- While part of the school's instructional focus this year is on creating critical thinkers and independent learners, this was not evident across the vast majority of classrooms visited. During a math lesson, second grade students worked with partners to share their strategies and solutions to math problems. Students were observed questioning each other on why they used a particular strategy, while the teacher circulated the classroom to monitor student discussions. Conversely, during a third grade science lesson, students shared their ideas directly with the teacher, with one opportunity to discuss their ideas around the use of lubricants, missing many opportunities to have students discuss their classmates' responses to questions, such as “Why should you not use lubricants in your car?”, “Why would a mechanic use grease for a car?” or “What are some other lubricants one can use to reduce friction and why?”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations regarding teaching and learning to all staff which is supported through various professional learning opportunities. The school provides regular feedback to families in order to support and position all learners on a path towards college and career readiness.

Impact

Open dialogue between school leaders and staff related to teacher practice have led to a system of accountability for school expectations. The school's ongoing feedback and communication to families around student progress has equipped them with the knowledge to understand and support their child's learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Prior to the start of the school year, administrators meet with all staff to outline the goals for the year, instructional expectations aligned to student learning, school procedures, and the instructional foci based on the analysis of previous year's data. Each administrator is responsible for presenting specific areas within the Power Point presentation and teachers are provided with this information on a flash drive as a future reference tool throughout the school year. Additionally, teachers receive ongoing professional development aligned to their needs based on observations of their practice and have the option to select trainings based on interest and the areas identified within post-observation conferences. Some examples of professional learning include differentiation to meet the needs of their diverse learners and differentiation and how it aligns to Danielson's Framework for Teaching.
- The school's professional development plan of support entitled "Strengthening Student Work through Strengthening Teacher Practice" provides various professional learning sessions which address the specific needs of staff, as well as their diverse students. The school plan of support outlines the purpose of the activities, such as lesson planning, visits to classrooms to view teacher practice and opportunities for follow-ups and debriefing sessions, along with the names of staff, the concerns of specific teaching practice and the next steps for follow-up. In addition, teachers receiving support are partnered with colleagues who serve as mentors and maintain a collaborative conference guide of support. This tool provides a clear portrait of the challenges teachers face as well as the support provided in the form of next steps from colleagues and coaches. Follow-up includes visits to teacher's classroom by mentor and school leaders to observe the teacher implementing some of the strategies provided to address the "focus area of concern." Feedback from school leaders address findings from earlier observations and explicitly communicate the expectation to employ the suggested strategies to address areas identified as developing practice or ways to push their practice.
- At the beginning of the school year, parents are informed of the school's goals, curricula expectations, data results from the previous year's state exams, and the importance of reading at home with children. During the annual Meet the Teacher night, teachers also communicate grade specific curricular and classroom expectations. The school provides classes and workshops for parents such as English as a second language, information on the NYSESLAT exams and supports for parents with students with disabilities. Parents also receive monthly curriculum letters which include what children will learn across all content areas, as well as student progress reports that explain the child's reading level and a list of suggested activities to further support children at home.