Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Clarence Witherspoon School

Q045

126-29 150th Street
Queens
NY 11436

Principal: Samantha Severin

Date of review: December 8, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Marion Wilson

The School Context

The Clarence Witherspoon School is an elementary school with 437 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 78% Black, 14% Hispanic, 1% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 52 % of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**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	**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		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that all curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and integrate the instructional shifts. Academic tasks are planned and refined using student work.

Impact
As a result of modifications to the curricula and academic tasks, unit plans highlight the connections to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts, while allowing a diversity of learners to access the curricula to promote cognitive engagement, as well as coherence within and across grades.

Supporting Evidence

- The school redesigned its literacy block (Reading and Writing) in Grades K-6 to support a balanced literacy workshop model approach for using ReadyGen, Scholastic Code X; and Teachers College Reading Writing Program while integrating the instructional shifts. In addition, there is a balance of informational and literary texts across and within units of study for all subject areas.

- Teachers plan instruction based on the development of Common Core Learning Standards through the use of I-Can statements, which are written in student-friendly and grade appropriate language, so that all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities can utilize during lessons and are used as learning targets.

- The re-adoption of the Teachers College Reading Writing Program (TCRWP), along with Ready Gen used as a supplemental resource, helps to support the planning of literacy units along with lessons and unit plans. Additionally, these programs assist teachers in the design of academic tasks, which are based on DOK levels 1-4.

- Lesson pacing and unit planning for math instruction, using Go Math and Connected Mathematics Practice 3 (CMP3), as curricular resources are focused on narrowing and deepening the scope of how time and energy are spent in the math classroom along with a prioritization of Common Core Learning Standards focus standards.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across most classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best, however, work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact
As a result of inconsistent teaching practices, students are not exposed to tasks which provide opportunities to engage in discussions that reflect high levels of student discussion, thinking and participation and result in varying levels of quality student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The use of Teachers College Reading Writing Program materials, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, allow for some student engagement and some levels of student discussion, as evidenced in a few of the classes visited, where some students were able to participate in collaborative team work with meaningful discussions. For example, in one classroom, students were asked to explain how a character's actions contributed to the sequence of events. During small group discussions, students acted as group leaders and had opportunities to share their ideas around the lesson focus. However, in another English Language Arts class, students were required to write facts about Jinsong, an eight-year old boy from China, but were unable to speak to one other about the facts they found in the story.

- While administrators and teachers articulated that students benefit from higher-order questioning and engaging in group or partnership discussions, in only three of the seven classrooms visited, students were working in groups or partnerships. Most lessons were teacher-centered with explicit instruction and provided limited opportunities for students to share their thinking within groups or partnerships. For example, in one math classroom, students were asked to draw quick pictures and record two-digit addition algorithms. Only a few students were able to explain their thinking or work with a partner to complete the task.

- The school believes that activities and assignments promote learning by requiring student thinking that emphasizes depth over breadth and encourages work products which produce high quality student work. However, in a few classes, students had to complete the same standard worksheet by writing down details directly from the text using sequence words like first, next, and last.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across some classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, checklists, and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula. In addition, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact
The results of inconsistent assessment practices across the school have hindered effective adjustments to instruction and have restricted teachers' and students' understanding of next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses assessment tools from Teachers College Reading Writing Program running records, along with Go Math assessments, math sprints, and math exemplars, to determine student performance and progress toward mastery. However, some teachers do not use the aligned rubrics or assessment tools to provide feedback to students, while others do not check for understanding during lessons by observing and listening in on student conversations or use the data to formulate small groups based on formative data.

- During meetings with students, some were able to articulate what they were learning during class time or from their work products based on general feedback, which was not aligned to rubric language. In some classes, feedback to students included, "good job or excellent job", which did not provide them with detailed information to fully understand the expectations of their work, next steps or how to assess their own work or to make improvements.

- Across some classrooms, teachers missed opportunities to check for student understanding of assignments before moving on in the lesson. For example, students were asked to write an argumentative piece to support their opinion for or against serving chocolate milk in schools. Some students were unable to explain the purpose of the rubric to improve or help with the writing task. Additionally, the use of thumbs up or thumbs down was seen in some classes visited, but data was not captured by teachers to inform curricula adjustments or next steps for teaching. For instance, during class visits, teachers continued teaching without memorializing responses on a checklist and did not make necessary adjustments during the point of instruction. In discussion with students during one lesson, they expressed being unclear of the expectations of the task of using text-based evidence to support their predictions, and articulated not knowing what to do to complete the assignment.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing

Findings
The school is in the process of implementing structures and systems to effectively communicate consistent high expectations of professionalism and instruction to staff. The school is beginning to develop communication systems with families in order to support students' progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact
As a result of inconsistent expectations communicated to staff regarding teaching and learning, some teachers are unclear about the expectations for effective teaching practices. As a result of more communication with families, the school is developing a system to provide consistent feedback to parents regarding student progress towards meeting Common Core Learning Standards.

Supporting Evidence

- There are Monday professional learning sessions tailored by administration to support teachers and build capacity based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, weekly emails to staff, memos and walkthrough feedback letters. However, teachers voiced that the trainings are unstructured, overwhelming, and do not allow opportunities for teachers to become proficient in one area at a time.

- While high expectations are being developed through parent workshops and progress reports, parents expressed that they are confused about how to support their children at home and were overwhelmed with the new math and reading programs. Furthermore, the inconsistent communication from the school, around progress reports and parent workshops were expressed as a concern for parents, as well.

- Parents expressed there are some attempts to have positive activities to include them in their children's learning progress, however, outreach is only done when parents contact the school and only select teachers regularly reach out to parents, despite the Tuesday afternoon family engagement time.

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

Findings
Across the school, the majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Most teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students on their grade.

Impact
The result of teacher team work has led to progress towards goals for groups of students in their reading levels. In addition, teachers are more equipped to monitor progress from writing tasks to provide strategic and targeted writing instruction for individual and groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- During an observed teacher team meeting, grade 6 teachers utilized the *Looking at Student Work Protocol* to determine what students know how to do, what is the desired thinking, and what the teacher will do to move students along. Furthermore, teachers were engaged in a discussion around student work from a recently administered, on-demand writing assessment and shared their findings around the improvements students made on the writing task and further supports needed for a small group of students.

- Teachers shared about the work being done in teams to support classroom instruction by the restructuring of the literacy block, increased opportunities to share during Monday sessions and the frequent analysis of running records. In addition, teachers articulated that teacher team work has helped inform the areas students continue to have difficulty within improving reading fluency and comprehension.

- Teachers articulated their progress towards achieving one of the school goals of increasing the number of students in grades K-2 reading at grade level proficiency, as measured by the TCRWP running record assessments. Teachers are also using protocols to analyze data and adjust curriculum within grades by measuring progress during team level meetings, based on conference notes from shared and guided reading practice activities and the implementation of the shifts into the revised curriculum.