



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Leonardo DaVinci School

24Q061

**98-50 50th Avenue
Queens
NY 11368**

Principal: Joseph Lisa

**Date of review: January 29, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Madelene Chan**

The School Context

IS 61 is a middle school with 2,354 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 4% Black, 85% Hispanic, 2% White, and 9% Asian students. The student body includes 32% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.30%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

The school curricula endorses rigor and generates academic tasks that encourage higher order thinking skills across grades and content areas for all students. The alignment of the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the content standards incorporate the instructional shifts.

Impact

Rigorous academic tasks and Common Core aligned units of study across subjects integrate the Arts and technology to develop critical thinking and promote college and career readiness for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula maps across content areas provide samples and activities that the school uses to craft meaningful and rigorous academic tasks so that all learners can be provided with challenging work. Through questioning scaffolds, using Depth of Knowledge language, students are asked to synthesize and extend their thinking. For example, in one 8th grade class students had to determine how preconceptions influence their sense of justice. Students analyzed particular lines of dialogue and incidents in their reading to show action, character motive and decisions. The teacher stated that since higher order questions and extended thinking have been incorporated into lessons there has been an increase in students' engagement and comprehension of complex text.
- Units of study across content areas encourage all students to analyze a variety of sources of evidence and complex themes in order to evaluate relevancy, accuracy and validity of information. As seen in the 7th Grade Common Core Literacy in Science Task, which was revised from last year to support real world application, students were asked to research Newton's Laws of Motion and apply their understanding of the effects of speed on a collision by creating a hypothesis, conducting an experiment, gathering data and writing a lab report with procedures and results that justify or negate their claim. Results of this task indicated that 79% of the students improved in organizing their information and quantifying their hypothesis using evidence cited from the readings.
- Lesson plans across subjects specifically detail learning targets aligned to the instructional shifts and CCLS. Essential and guiding questions, quick writes, academic vocabulary learning objectives, mini lessons and differentiated station work are present to deepen students understanding of content and lesson focus. Students agree that station work helps them "dive into the work" and that group work helps them have a "sounding board" with peers. Results show that students with disabilities have shown progress in reading levels and math proficiency as a result of this process of teaching and learning.
- Every student is scheduled for a talent period, twice a week, which affords students opportunities in dance, art, drama, photography and band. The promotion and maintenance of these programs is a credit to the creative scheduling of the administration. Students are eager to share their experiences in these classes and are articulate about how their experiences can lead to future professions.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school uses common assessments, performance based rubrics, teacher-designed units of study and grading policies aligned to key standards to understand students' progress toward goals.

Impact

Students are able to work towards their goals through the use of effective curricular, instructional adjustments and feedback from staff and peers.

Supporting Evidence

- Each department has set-up a grading policy that holds students accountable for 60% of post-assessment results in their grade. The goal of this policy is to hold students more accountable towards meeting state standards while also preparing them for college and career readiness. Students are expected to self-monitor the information on their goals sheets as it relates to their pre and post assessments so that they can assess their own progress. As a result of this practice students are better equipped to own what they are learning and to be responsible for their intended goals.
- Teacher teams use assessment results and student work to monitor and revise curriculum maps and pacing calendars using Universal Design for Learning and the instructional shifts to maximize instructional opportunities for all subgroups of students. Content area departments determine when curriculum is rigorous, engaging and collaborative by comparing data to tasks and units. After a review of the item analysis of the English Language Arts state test, curriculum was adjusted by adding rich informational texts to all content area tasks. Outcomes of this work indicated that anchor texts enabled students to provide stronger evidentiary arguments when citing their claims.
- Students are articulate about how rubrics attached to their work are used as a guide to determine how well they did and how they can become better at the skills listed. One student stated, "The rubric shows me that in order to get a higher grade I have to focus on the skills in the advanced column." Another student added, "Rubrics help us to better understand our strengths and weaknesses." Although students were able to discuss rubric importance and the purpose of teacher feedback, some students were unclear on specific next steps to take to build on the skills already achieved.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

High quality supports and strategic entry points for English language learners and students with disabilities are seen across subject areas. Student discussions require application and analysis and prompt ownership of the stages of learning.

Impact

Lessons demonstrate refinement of instructional strategies that provide multiple entry points throughout all content areas and develop student ownership of learning in tasks, work products and student reflections.

Supporting Evidence

- In the majority of classes observed, instructional practices are purposefully designed for the curricula and are grounded in a philosophy that students learn best when they are fully engaged and motivated by the content of the lesson. Individual teachers and teams are utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as a guide for exemplary practices to confer with students, and to guide them in their work. Teacher teams have incorporated the practices from the book, The Leader in Me by Stephen Covey to help students create a culture of ownership of their work and learning experiences. Teachers posit that by adopting the 7 habits of leadership, students display increased confidence in taking learning risks, and they connected the 7 habits of leadership to their daily life in school and at home. One student stated that he uses the 7 habits, “especially the one that says to look at life as a win-win” when he is having trouble with a math problem. He said, “Now I see the struggle as a good thing because I am thinking like I never have before.”
- In one 6th grade self-contained bilingual literacy classroom a group of English language learners participated in a speaking and listening activity with objectives focused on vocabulary building and character motives. The lesson provided visual prompts like vocabulary cards, related texts and strategies like chunking and deconstructing words for meaning. At the end of the lesson students were able to answer the essential questions and show evidence to defend their statements.
- Across the school, student notebooks, bulletin boards, portfolios and assessment folders show cognitively engaging tasks and challenging activities that promote critical thinking skills. In a 6th grade English language learner class, students needed to determine how cultural assimilation impacted a person’s identity. Depending on their levels of readiness, students worked in groups to draft their essays, complete an informative writing rubric, complete an essay outline, and review a student reflection sheet. The teacher aligned the 7 Habits of Learning to college and career readiness by explaining that being able to analyze one’s thoughts, words, and actions is a learning skill as well as a life skill. Students concluded the lesson by personalizing their goal sheets and sharing their reflections with peers.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

A wide range of strategies are utilized by school leaders to instill high expectations across the school. Partnerships with families are cohesive, and effective communication regarding learning skills, content knowledge and social supports is readily available.

Impact

Families are being supported to help children at home with workshops about being effective learners, academic success and positive work habits so that students can attain college and career readiness skills. The Danielson Framework for Teaching is used to hold staff accountable for achieving goals regarding professional and instructional responsibilities

Supporting Evidence

- Through the use of Engrade software, high expectations are communicated in a variety of ways. Students are provided with rubric-aligned feedback on their assignments, common core tasks and assessments. Teachers provide comments and responses to students about homework and projects. Additionally, through Engrade, they also provide parents with timely and specific feedback regarding their child's progress. Parents explain that every Tuesday afternoon they have an opportunity to meet their child's teacher and discuss the teacher's findings that are posted that week.
- To ensure that students are ready for the next level of learning, college and career readiness is promoted throughout departments and through each of the school's five academies which are named for different colleges like Yale, Princeton, Harvard, Cornell and Stanford. School and family partnerships are strong and described by parents as a "window into their children's lives." Parents are grateful for the high expectations that are consistently communicated through phone, email and school letters and the level of collaboration that is available to parents to have a voice on school decision making. One parent explained that the school embraces every child so that student needs are known among their guidance counselor, dean and assistant principal and that learning targets are set for each child to progress.
- Students noted that the school purposefully prepares them for high school in a number of ways but specifically in their content classes. A student asserted, "Here we take the Living Environment Regents. They don't do that at my cousin's middle school." Another mentioned that a teacher showed the class 9th grade standards for how to write a report. A student also remarked, "Some people don't think that kids our age should read *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, but we're reading it now before we even get to high school." Results indicated that last year, 90% of the students who took the history regents passed and the mean average was 84%.

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

Teachers engage in inquiry work by analyzing the impact of assessments, teacher practices and team decisions while teacher leadership roles are created and maintained.

Impact

An improvement in students' work in literacy and math is a result of the leadership developed through teacher teams and the deep collaboration that has led to improved instructional practices for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Through assessment analysis, teacher teams are conducting research to strengthen practices like building comprehension skills, expanding opportunities to provide feedback to students, monitoring and revising curriculum maps and pacing calendars using Universal Design for Learning and implementing instructional shifts to maximize learning for all student subgroups. Decisions around instructional priorities have been made based on pre and post-test reviews in all content areas. Teachers agree that through shared decision making and strong collaboration the most successful differentiated tools yielding progress in reading have been student share outs, circle maps depicting academic vocabulary, and high tiered vocabulary using picture clues.
- During bi-weekly inquiry team meetings, teachers are involved in analysis of student work, lesson planning and instructional outcomes with the goal of understanding the next steps needed for success. Aligned with the school's instructional goal around student engagement and the *Capacity Framework for Learning*, teams have a specific focus on studying targeted groups of students. One team observed was comparing math scores of current ELLs to former ones and determining successful strategies that were used to help students improve. Strategies included comparing and contrasting solution methods and using reasoning, planning, and evidence to support mathematical claims. To date, the team has developed a series of formative assessments they will use to determine impact on student gains.
- Teachers in the vertical team shared that their work with lesson study and *The Leader In Me* philosophies has helped them to evaluate lessons in a risk free manner and plan together to meet the needs of all students. They stated that they compare effective strategies, ask questions about best practices, and plan together in order to strengthen their own skills. This process has also helped them encourage students to own the work they are producing. One teacher said, "We are helping ourselves as teachers, but more importantly we are creating student leaders."