



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning**

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Forest Elementary**

**Elementary Q071**

**62-85 Forest Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11385**

**Principal: Indiana Soto**

**Date of review: January 16, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Shirley Wheeler-Massey**

## The School Context

P.S. 71 is an elementary school with 866 students from grade kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 55% Hispanic, 41% White, 2% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 10% 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 92.8%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the school, teachers and students use a myriad of assessment strategies that align to the school's curricula and provide a comprehensive view of students' strengths and next steps.

### Impact

The school's strategic assessment practices have led to teachers providing students with clear and significant feedback, which informs effective instructional adjustments and allows students to be reflective and understand their future learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across content areas are using assessments such as rubrics, Scholastic Reading Inventory, pre and post assessments from Go Math, Ready Gen, and, for writing to diagnose students' learning needs, a school created *Diagnose Student Learning* tool. Teachers use data from these assessments to organize small groups, adjust their instruction and map out tasks that address students' specific strengths and gaps in learning.
- Students are actively engaged in the process of understanding and diagnosing their learning needs. In collaboration with peers or independently, students use rubrics to color-code their writing, reflect on their writing process and provide warm and cool feedback to each other using the Restate, Answer, Detail, Detail and Inference (RADDI) tool in order to improve their writing or to try another strategy to solve problems. Additionally, students use guidelines from teacher-created and Exemplar rubrics to create their own student-friendly rubrics, which allow them to have a deeper understanding of the assignment or task expectations. Students shared that having the opportunity to create their own rubrics and to use them before, during and after completing tasks, gives them a clear understanding of where they are, where they need to go and how to get there, which is helpful in their revision process.
- Throughout the school, feedback on student work displayed on bulletin boards and in work folders is clear, specific and meaningful and allows them to address areas that need further work. Additionally, students respond to peer and teacher feedback by writing on post-it notes the steps they will take to address the cool feedback to improve their work, which, they say, is revisited by their teachers during the next phase of the writing process.
- Across classrooms visited, teachers consistently circulated around the classroom to monitor understanding by asking clarifying and probing questions and using a checklist to track understanding and form either on-the-spot or future small groups to allow teachers the opportunity to reteach a skill or provide enrichment tasks that support students' diverse needs. For example, in one classroom, students were working in small groups on practicing multiplication facts and problem-solving tasks using different math games, based on the previous day's lesson and the results of a recent multiplication assessment. The teacher visited each small group to monitor their progress, offer specific feedback and provided support when students exhibited challenges with the tasks.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

### Findings

While there is a shared understanding of how students learn best, across the vast majority of teachers, which is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts, all teachers do not always provide strategic extension tasks for all learners.

### Impact

The school's shared beliefs around teaching and learning has provided opportunities for students to be exposed to engaging and challenging learning experiences that require them to be reflective and critical thinkers. However, more strategically designed extension and enrichment tasks would further push students' to demonstrate critical thinking in their work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms observed, teaching practices were clearly aligned to the school's mutual belief of teaching to the whole child based on their learning styles, as well as emphasizing the instructional focus of component 3d—using assessment in instruction from Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*. Furthermore, the school also believes that students should be provided with actionable feedback so that they are aware of what they know and what they need to learn. Across classrooms visited, students were provided with scaffolds such as pictures of chocolate bars for division and fractional representation, paper tiles to demonstrate their thinking and understanding of a task, along with math snap cubes and counters to support their learning. Students were also held accountable by using the rubric for the task to reflect on their own work and were required to explain their thinking to their teachers and peers, as both provided warm and cool feedback to challenge their thinking.
- Throughout the school, students were actively engaged in discussions that pushed them to think critically through tiered tasks that allowed them to approach the content at their academic level and based on their specific needs. For instance, in one classroom, students were provided with the opportunity to explore the relationship between multiplication and division by either solving multi-step problems or learning to divide equal parts, arrays and measurement quantities by using drawings and different equations to represent unknown numbers and discussing their findings within partnerships or small groups. In another classroom, students used color-coding to identify various types of evidence within a claim and were required to explain whether the evidence fell into specific categories such as quotes, definitions, analyzing visuals, statistics or paraphrasing. Students were expected to defend their responses, first within their small groups and then with the whole class, with specific evidence from the text and reasoning that aligned to their answers.
- While the majority of teachers observed provided probing questions, such as “How does this information represent paraphrasing?” and “How can you change the problem to show that Tito ate more pizza than Luis?”, as well as academic tasks that were differentiated and pushed students beyond their comfort level, there were a few instances where students who were secure with the content or strategy, were not provided with different or extension tasks that allowed them to move beyond their peers. For example, during one class visit, the teacher presented a writing lesson to all students by explaining the same strategy that some had already mastered within their independent writing and by expecting them to utilize the same graphic organizer to initiate the writing process, preventing the more proficient students from using a different approach and moving ahead with their own writing task.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Administrators and teachers across grades and content areas implement coherent and rigorous curricula that are aligned to the Common Core Learning standards with purposeful integration of the instructional shifts.

### Impact

As a result of the collaborative efforts to design and restructure curricula and academic tasks, there is coherence across the school that offers all students access to a range of engaging learning experiences that challenges their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff have collaboratively looked at the curricula to identify the gaps within the Ready Gen program and to develop tiered tasks that expose students to more content specific vocabulary which requires them to utilize the academic terms in the justification of their thinking. For example, in science, students are expected to make observations of science materials, discuss their findings with a partner and then provide written evidence to substantiate their findings, using differentiated concluding sentence starters.
- Across content areas, students are exposed to lessons that require them to cite text-based evidence in their written and verbal responses, solve multi-step problems, as well as engage in debates to defend their mathematical thinking and reasoning of differentiated tasks. During debates, “student group managers” are expected to push their peers to explain their answers thoroughly and hold each other accountable during group deliberations and “thought partner” discussions. Students defend their reasoning by sharing their strategies using content specific vocabulary and demonstrating step-by-step, how they approach problems.
- Curriculum maps and teacher’s lesson plans reflect planning that ensures all students have the opportunity to exhibit their thinking through differentiated and scaffolded activities that support their diverse needs. Lesson plans reviewed include an essential question, teaching point, various assessment strategies and differentiated and tiered tasks that indicate the planning for the different learners within the classroom, where students are exposed to the same content but are provided opportunities to work on their level through a variety of well-structured rigorous tasks. For instance, fifth graders are being challenged through tasks that require them to use a variety of text evidence to support a claim. Third grade students are asked to develop new endings or scenes for a story, while first grade English Language Learners (ELLs) are being pushed to develop informational writing products.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

School leaders and staff consistently emphasize high expectations through ongoing communication and feedback with learning opportunities that supports all learners' needs.

### **Impact**

The result of transparent and open communication regarding teaching and learning, has led to a school culture where all students and staff share the responsibility of ensuring all members of the school community work collaboratively to prepare students for the next level.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Ongoing professional learning opportunities and support are provided to teachers by the administrative team, instructional coaches and selected teachers, as a direct result from observation findings and feedback that address teacher's pedagogical practices. Grade teams have engaged in this work by sharing best practices through teacher-initiated video-taped "lab-site" classroom visits, where they observe the practice, provide each other feedback and then make adjustments to the practice, with follow-up visits by the team. Teachers articulated their interest in participating in this work to support their colleagues' professional growth and to improve student outcomes and achievement across the school.
- While teachers have different methods of communicating their feedback to students, all models exhibit high expectations to students regarding their learning by allowing them to be self-reflective, provide feedback to their peers and hold each other accountable for improving their work. Discussions with students indicate that they are very clear in where they stand in all subject areas based on feedback from their teachers and in looking at rubrics to determine what they need to do to improve their work and get to the next level.
- Students shared that working in small groups on activities that challenge them, with supports from their teachers and peers, really helps them improve their understanding of what is being taught. Additionally, students expressed feeling extremely prepared for the next grade as a result of their teachers always requiring them to prove their thinking, challenge themselves, reflect on their work, and take responsibility for improving their own work, which, they said, teachers explained are important life skills.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Teacher leaders facilitate inquiry-based professional collaborations where teams effectively engage in looking at student work and data.

### Impact

Professional collaborations on grade and vertical teams have led to an increase of teachers sharing best practices, embedding the instructional shifts within their lessons, and having opportunities to have a voice in critical curricula and instructional decisions that have improved student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across the school meet twice a week for double periods of grade common planning and meet vertically in content areas on Mondays to look at student work and data to develop strategies, to plan tiered academic tasks, to organize small groups, as well as to make revisions to their instructional practices. During an observed meeting, teachers utilized the *Modified Tuning Protocol* in partnerships to identify specific teaching strategies and next steps based on their colleagues' feedback on their students' work. Teachers engaged in discussions of how different strategies would have the most substantial impact on student learning across the grade, followed by sharing ideas of how they would structure or revamp the tasks for the upcoming writing unit.
- Teachers expressed that having opportunities to share ideas and practices at grade and vertical (professional development) meetings has given them more confidence to try different teaching approaches in their classrooms and to feel supported by their colleagues and the administration when they need to modify their practices. One teacher stated that the increase of collaboration across the school has really enhanced her pedagogical practices and her ability to teach writing more effectively. This was evident in student writing throughout the school, the feedback protocols that are used to improve writing, and the strategies that teachers have begun to employ that were generated during based on team meetings and the weekly professional learning sessions that are offered to all staff.
- While instructional coaches are in place to support grade meetings, all teachers have an active role in which they rotate responsibility of teacher leader on a monthly basis. This role requires them to ensure that staff members are informed of the weekly/monthly expectations, logistical and policy updates. The school's professional development team conducts a data analysis and provides recommendations for specific professional development sessions, which are often facilitated by teachers across the school.
- As a learning partner school, there are three model teachers in place that conduct action-research on specific discussion strategies, which are then turn keyed to the staff. This year, teachers suggested to the principal that they videotape themselves in order to model best pedagogical practices, as well as identify gaps in their practice, in order to support student learning across the school. With the support of administrators, teachers across all grades are engaging in this practice in order to identify strategies that are impactful and support students' learning needs.