



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 120 Queens

Elementary Q120

**58-01 136 Street
Queens
NY 11355**

Principal: Joan Monroe

**Dates of review: January 30, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

The School Context

P.S. 120 Queens is a/an Elementary school with 1041 students from PK through grade 5. The school population comprises 0.60% Black, 15% Hispanic, 2% White, and 82% Asian students. The student body includes 43% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 96.7%.

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.	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	Focus	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.	Additional Findings	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 has thoughtfully identified and adapted curricula that strategically embed the instructional shifts, with a sharp lens focused on the specific student needs of their community.

Impact

Former and current English language learners, who make up the overwhelming majority of the school's population, as well as students with special needs and accelerated students, are all interacting with rigorous material and are therefore able to demonstrate their thinking in a variety of ways.

Supporting Evidence

- Although the school always performed well overall, concern about the demands of the Common Core on its very significant English language learner population led the staff to explore reading, writing and mathematics curriculum options that would be sufficiently rigorous while also providing the necessary scaffolding. In addition, the school sought curricula that would allow for greater ease of independence, since many students come from non-English speaking homes. Since adopting these curricula, the school has been reworking some of the key aspects of their former curricular practices which benefitted students as well, and integrating the two approaches to ensure a well-rounded experience for all learners that challenges them and demands that they think and problem solve.
- Teachers utilize the block schedule to engage students in project based and hands-on work. On the day of this visit, many classes in the school across multiple grades were participating in science activities and conversations around food and nutrition that were aligned with one of the school's external partners. Students were engaged in debates about the merits of different food groups, or creating healthy menus, or working in partnerships to determine the nutritional value of various foods. In other classes, students were creating and testing their own circuits or analyzing the properties of different rocks and minerals.
- The school has been involved with Thinking Maps and these were evident throughout every classroom and utilized across various curricular areas. These maps helped many students, particularly English language learners and students with special needs process their own ideas as well as generate material to help them write. Students frequently used these maps even when their teachers had not expected or suggested it, demonstrating that they are a tool that has become integral to their thinking and processing. During the student work meeting, a few students shared how they used some of these graphic organizers to help them prepare for writing the research papers or essays that they shared.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Teaching strategies and practices reflect an overall consistency of vision that provides access and entry to different groups of learners.

Impact

Application of the Danielson framework has helped teachers implement a clear vision of pedagogy across the school to focus on meeting the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- When speaking with the principal and her cabinet, they shared that classroom visits would display a vision of experiential learning for students, robust development of vocabulary, consistent use of strategies to promote thinking, and plentiful opportunities for students to practice English. Teachers in both the grade team meeting and question and answer session asserted that the work they have done together on unpacking the Danielson rubric has gone a long way towards unifying a vision of practice.
- Classroom visits revealed that while there were some missed opportunities to engage students in lively, dynamic discussion, there was a consistent emphasis on using academic language, and a great deal of experiential learning that required students to debate, cite evidence from relevant sources, and use of thinking maps. In most classrooms, students were actively engaged in a hands-on task while teachers served as facilitators of questioning to push student thinking.
- Recognizing the needs of their near 80 percent English language learner student population, the school's instructional foci this year were on the development of vocabulary and the deepening of questioning techniques. Vocabulary development was in abundant evidence in each classroom. Teachers stopped frequently to share new words or to ensure that students were noting a challenging word. In addition, teachers previewed vocabulary during mini-lessons and paid special attention to idiomatic language that may be confusing. Classroom labels and word walls accompanied by pictures also supported language development.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school utilizes multiple assessment practices to analyze outcomes at the classroom, grade and school levels.

Impact

Plentiful information available to teachers enables them to provide modifications and make adjustments to curriculum as necessary.

Supporting Evidence

- A wide array of assessments tied directly to the school's chosen curricula provide daily, weekly, and unit based assessments. Mathematics assessments are often performance based and involve constructive response. In addition to regular end of unit assessments in reading, the school utilizes a leveled reading approach and students are very aware of their levels and what they need to do reach the next level. Students are given rubrics and they are most often used to assess projects or longer writing pieces, although sometimes they are not used to their full benefit. While many students were very clear about the given feedback, others, particularly English language learners, had not fully internalized the overly complex language. In addition, while individual teachers had clear grading and homework policies, parents expressed that they would like more consistency from class to class and across the school.
- The school's priority is to meet the needs of its very large population of English language learners and former English language learners. To that end, they are always monitoring student progress and making adjustments as necessary to the scope, sequence and depth of the curriculum. The school's chosen curricula provide built-in common assessments that are used by each grade level to make decisions about adjustments and necessary modifications. In addition, they administer on-demand tasks or grade wide "quick checks" that help teacher teams determine next steps for groups of students.
- While the school has systems in place for on-the-spot assessments or ongoing checks for understanding, classroom visits revealed that some teachers use these extensively while others apply them in a more perfunctory fashion. In a fourth grade Instructional Co-Teaching classroom, the teachers were each taking very precise notes that included noticings, findings and next steps, which they were using to form groups. In other classrooms, some teachers utilized the school's three color (red, yellow, green) system to determine levels of understanding and pull small groups or extend the mini-lesson.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school clearly communicates a vision of high expectations and future success to all members of the community.

Impact

Teachers set high expectations for academic achievement, and clearly communicate those expectations to families and students, who strive to attain their educational goals at each succeeding level.

Supporting Evidence

- Learning and understanding the expectations of the Danielson framework has transformed much of the teaching at the school. Staff was unanimous in their expression that it has unified them, made expectations much clearer, and has elevated the level of professionalism and professional conversation at the school. They credit the extensive support and training they received and the continued focus on ensuring their effectiveness. Administration has set a goal of ensuring that the majority of staff receives effective ratings on the measures of teacher practice and they have been actively working to provide feedback that will help them achieve the goal.
- The very large parent group represented every grade level and every key demographic in the school community. They all expressed and agreed that the school's high expectations have made them more accountable for their children's success. One parent spoke for many when she explained that her daughter's teacher pushed her daughter "well beyond what she thought she could do, because I am preparing your children for college." Parents appreciate the regular progress reports, classroom newsletters, and opportunities to meet with the principal to better understand how to help their children meet their aspirations.
- When asked what the school's expectations were for them, students clearly articulated expectations that indicate they are thinking about future success. Responses included "be a good listener and a good partner in discussions," "stay focused so we can get in to good middle schools," and "don't be afraid to share your opinion about what's happening."

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

Teacher teams and teacher leaders are contributing to the forward trajectory of the school's work in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Impact

The revitalized commitment to sharing and learning from one another has helped many teachers re-energize their practice, which has resulted in many students making significant progress.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has established an instructional cabinet that consists of representatives from each grade. These teacher leaders are responsible for the ongoing agenda setting and for sharing information with their grade colleagues. In addition, grade leaders, who are different members of the faculty, are also included in various aspects of decision-making.
- Grade level teacher teams meet weekly and are focused on meeting the school's instructional goals around English language learners and vocabulary development. During the meeting observed for this review, the fifth grade team was analyzing an on-demand task meant to measure acquisition levels in an unfamiliar context. The team had previously reviewed the work and asked one another probing questions about the targeted students. They were now attempting to define a strategy that would enable them to help these students. Many ideas were shared and several teachers were able to identify a concrete step they would take. Although team members had defined roles, the lack of a formal protocol did not allow for equal contributions from all members and lack of commitment to the next step. However, teachers were able to cite several examples of how their own practice has evolved as a result of the work they have been doing this year on teams.
- Teachers report that over the last two years there has been a significant increase in the amount of teacher voice in key aspects of the school's development. Longtime teachers stressed that although the staff had always been supportive of one another, the level of sharing and collaboration that takes place now has "upped the ante" for each teacher's practice and that they now "feel obligated to do it better" because they are all working on the same key priorities.