



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Joseph Pulitzer School

Middle School Q145

**33-34 80th Street
Queens
NY 11372**

Principal: Dr. Dolores Beckham

**Date of review: May 14, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Andrea Harris**

The School Context

The Joseph Pulitzer School is a middle school with 2,064 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 2% Black, 89% Hispanic, 2% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 -2014 was 95.6%.

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	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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff have implemented systems and structures that align with high expectations and connect to a path to college and career readiness while offering consistent ongoing feedback to staff, students and parents. The Danielson Framework for Teaching is used as a guide to ensure the alignment of high quality instruction is delivered daily.

Impact

Systems and structures that hold staff, parents and students accountable for achieving those high expectations have been collaboratively developed fostering an environment that promotes high levels of student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership uses various methods such as professional learning communities, teacher departmental and grade level meetings to communicate high expectations to parents and all staff members. Teacher teams discuss these expectations and how to best implement them on the classroom level. Additionally leaders set clear expectations during one-on-one conversations with teachers broadening opportunities for teacher by in and collaboration. For example, parent and student orientations are held at the start of every school year. Students and parents learn about the high expectations and receive a written overview of the year's curriculum and work products students are expected to complete. Teachers developed a self-assessment tool for students using the Danielson rubric prior to monthly meetings. This tool helps to drive the conversation as well as teacher reflection regarding norming effective and highly effective instructional practices.
- There are teacher grade teams and teacher department teams focusing on the improvement of teachers' daily delivery of instruction. Monday professional learning opportunities for staff promote high expectations. For example, staff studied the art of questioning along with Depth of Knowledge matrix that resulted in an increase in higher level questioning evidenced in both teacher and student talk. In classrooms teachers can be heard using such prompts as, "Can you explain your thinking?" or "How did you come to that conclusion? Support your response with text based evidence."
- Families receive a monthly newsletter highlighting expectations. Every month there are parent workshops, emails and phone blasts sharing information such as Common Core Learning standards and their effect on daily practices of teaching and learning. Parents are consistently informed about what is being taught as well as learning expectations for all students.
- To provide on-going feedback all teachers have conferring binders, and students are provided actionable feedback during and following all learning experiences. School leadership makes weekly visits to classrooms ensuring instructional coherency across grades including those containing English Language Learners and students with disabilities. To build learning capacity in the home there are parent workshops. This is in addition to Tuesday parent teacher meeting. During these meetings parents have opportunities to engage in conversations regarding various learning topics.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school provides instructional supports and engaging student activities that align to the instructional focus with lessons consistently providing multiple entry points and extensions that deepen student learning and reasoning.

Impact

This has resulted in consistent structured opportunities for students to produce meaningful work products and to experience lessons that are challenging as well as questions that broaden students' problem solving abilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Classrooms visited had students organized in groups with consistent participation in discussions. Discussions were supported by teacher and student prompts that focused on consistent deepening of student thinking. Students explored their thinking and at times challenged each other's ideas and justified thoughts using text-based evidence to support their reasoning. For example, in a grade seven math class the teacher created a graphic organizer to support students' working on two-dimensional geometric shapes. She asked students to find the sum of the interior angles of a polygon as based on the number of triangles that are formed by drawing diagonals from one vertex. Students worked in pairs discussing the best way to solve the problem and then executed a solution. The teacher called three students to the board, and students shared out regarding the strategies used to find solutions to the problem. In each case students responded appropriately explaining how they found their solution.
- In most classrooms students engaged in self-selected activities and received feedback from the teacher as well as other students. Student discussions were robust with high level questions prompted by teachers. At times when students completed tasks quickly, they immediately turned their attention to self-selected extra credit activities that further challenged and deepened their thinking.
- During a sixth grade math lesson students were asked to complete a worksheet on converting fractions and decimals. The class was divided into 5 work groups all using the same worksheet. The teacher circulated the room asking students to explain their work using evidence to support their answers. Students had a Depth of Knowledge matrix on their desk and were expected to reference it in their answers. Students in four out of the five groups successfully completed the worksheet. The teacher assisted the students in the fifth group who were unable to complete the task.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

In all content areas the curriculum is rigorous and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) targeting higher order learning skills for students.

Impact

The curriculum is coherently aligned providing opportunities for all learners to engage in tasks that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff of the Joseph Pulitzer School has created their own curriculum maps and unit plans that align with the Common Core learning standards. This has led to students being required to extend their thinking and cite evidence as a way of demonstrating understanding and mastery of content knowledge across all content areas. In addition to having content goals all lessons must include a skills goal. At the end of each unit teachers have embedded assessments that promote alignment with the common core learning standards and allow for instructional adjustments based on individual student needs as well as English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The Depth of Knowledge Matrix is used to support higher order thinking skills and to assess the level of rigor within student performance tasks.
- The school has aligned the mathematics curriculum with the Common Core Learning Standards as well as the scope and sequence of CMP3. The inquiry team identified areas of weakness and revised the CMP3 math program to support daily instructional practices. Teachers collaboratively develop lesson plans that target higher order thinking skills and can be adjusted based on individual student needs including English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Evidence of student mathematical work products was displayed in classrooms.
- Across all grade levels curricular and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work products and data ensuring that all learners inclusive of English language learners and students with disabilities have appropriate access to tasks that are cognitively engaging and promote college and care readiness. Teachers across the school have adopted the practice of incorporating a linguistic objective into every lesson plan.
- The English Language Arts and Mathematics curriculums have components that allow teachers to target the needs of English language learners and special needs students via the use of computers. Lessons are easily accessible and engaging for learners promoting adjustments and flexibility when needed.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers create and apply common assessments, rubrics and grading policies ensuring a common understanding of performance and progress among varied student groups in all content areas.

Impact

Teachers meet and use these formative assessments to inform daily instructional practices and adjustments. Students receive instructions based on their individual needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher planning is based on various common benchmark assessments given during and at the completion of units across content areas. This affords teachers opportunity to adjust curricular lessons targeting the needs of all students inclusive of English language learners as well as students with disabilities. Teachers share these results as well as strategies for improving their instructional practice. It is a school wide expectation that the practice for constant checks for student understanding be a routine part of every lesson. For example, across content area classes there is the use of peer-to-peer assessment while in special education and classes for English language learners use the simple thumbs up or thumbs down strategy to show understanding.
- Teacher developed rubrics and assessment tools foster student self-assessment of their work. Students are consistently asked to explain their thinking based on a rubric. For example, a check-off style rubric was used by students in English language arts, math and science classes to support higher order thinking and student-to-student feedback. Across classrooms this check off style rubric as well as a Depth of Knowledge tool is affixed to the desk top of every student for his or her personal reference. Students constantly refer to these tools when engaged in learning, speaking and listening activities. This practice allows teachers to make immediate adjustments in their teaching throughout lessons.
- Teacher leaders are responsible for sharing the results of all common assessments with school leadership to determine progress made on both individual, classroom and grade levels towards meeting school wide goals. These performance levels are designed to align with New York State testing levels of one, two, three or four. For example, on ELA and math exams containing 25 questions a student would have to score at least a 19 correct to be considered a level 2. Parents are consistently kept abreast of student performance by teachers' use of Tuesday additional outreach to parent time. This is done during on-site teacher/parent meetings or via telephone conference.

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

Teacher teams meet regularly to analyze and discuss student performance and work products determining how best to use this information to drive daily instructional practices.

Impact

Teachers consistently use various forms of data to determine students' strengths and weakness and to make purposeful decisions to adjust teaching focusing the individual needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, teachers engage in structured, inquiry based activities that promote professional collaborations towards achieving school goals and deliver rigorous lessons addressing the CCLS instructional shifts. Teachers engage in inter-visitation and view each other as resources for validating their work and ensuring instructional coherence content wide and across grade levels. This work has resulted is strengthening the instructional capacity among teachers within the school community. Teachers credit strong teamwork for the increase in student achievement in as evidence by the growth of more than 3% percentage points on both ELA an Math state standardized exams.
- Teacher teams use a broad range of data including classroom inter-visitation to support teacher development. They have also incorporated the data from the student surveys fostering staff members to reflect deeply about teaching and learning. Teachers were empowered from the school wide philosophy of “Each one... Teach one...” resulting in the providing of professional sessions for colleagues by colleagues. For example based on their school wide assessment there was a need to focus on writing. The data also supported the need to build trust among the staff prior to targeting classroom practices in this area. This resulted in several opportunities for teachers to share best practices in both formal and informal setting. Teacher team groups developed writing benchmarks and rubrics for both horizontal and vertical use among the staff. The improvement in writing for students including students with disabilities and English language learners is evident and proudly displayed throughout the building.
- Teacher teams work collaboratively reviewing norms as they analyze student work. All team meetings are driven by outcome based agendas. Conversations focus on how can I teach and re-teach content ensuring that all students learn and take ownership applying and analyzing their work demonstrating critical thinking. Distributive leadership is at the forefront of teacher-led collaborative meetings. The main focus of these meetings allows teachers latitude with instructional empowerment to guide discussions on student learning as well as how best to address any gaps that may surface. Teachers feel they have a real voice and decision making power involving daily delivery of instructional content.