

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 154 Queens

Elementary School Q154

**75-02 162 STREET
Queens
NY11366**

Principal: Dr. Tara B. Davidson

**Dates of review: March 13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Danielle DiMango**

The School Context

P.S. 154 Queens is an elementary school with 743 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 8% Black, 22% Hispanic, 12% White, and 57% Asian students. The student body includes 25% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.8%.

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.	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	Additional Findings	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.	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

3.4 High Expectations

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

High expectations are structured and implemented with mutually accountable systems that include administration, staff, students and their families and are well aligned to the needs of students and the school's instructional vision.

Impact

Administrators, staff and families maintain clear lines of reciprocal communication that allow students to focus on learning leading to better student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- In addition to a variety of workshops offered to parents throughout the school year and on Tuesday afternoons, parents can attend classes with their children on the first Friday of every month. These events also include time for parents to meet with leadership and staff to engage in activities aligned to curriculum, the school wide instructional focus and the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards. During the parent meeting, parents shared how their training in thinking maps allow them entry to better support their students with their writing, math word problem solving and reading comprehension skills. Other trainings for parents include book of the month activities such as designing high level questions to engage in at home, understanding academic vocabulary, and how to read and understand student assessments and data.
- After every unit of study and post assessment exam, teachers send home individualized student progress reports that highlight standards addressed within the unit, provides student post assessment results, and lists skills that parents can reinforce at home. For example, one second grade assessment letter focused on the two-digit addition unit of study. Reinforcement skills for parents to address included practice adding two digit numbers together break apart addends as tens and ones and find the sums of three addends. Also included were supports for the next unit of study: two-digit subtraction. Parents were asked to have their children use a number line to solve two-digit subtraction and review the concept of grouping.
- The school wide instructional focus this year was determined in collaboration with teachers across grades and through focused training, such as studying collaborative questions and discussions, assigning classroom roles for group work, content focused conversation prompts and thick and thin questioning for high and low level questions. This work has grown into a variety of other school-wide initiatives. For example, school wide focus on collaborative group work and discussion has grown from teacher practice to improving student rubrics, designing parent workshops, a focus on full implementation of thinking maps and a growing partnership with teacher interest in the Kagan program to build cooperative learning strategies. This work has built capacity of teacher leaders where teachers are leading professional learning activities around these focus areas.
- In consultation with the school leadership team and Policy Pow Wow committee, the school community developed and launched the academic and grading policy handbook. This has served as a guide for students, teachers and parents to clarify academic expectations and their alignment to the standards and report card grades. This policy has standardized the ways that student learning and mastery is measured in the school community. Within and across grades, assignments, tests, projects and classroom activities include a performance indicator aligned to the standards that indicates level of mastery or if a student is on track to mastery of the targeted standard. Each student's mastery level is a major factor in determining the grade for a subject or course.

Area of Focus

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

Regularly scheduled meetings engage all staff in different disciplines and configurations in examining student data and work products, using an inquiry approach. Distributive leadership practices are in place that focuses on building curricula and pedagogical alignment and improving student learning opportunities.

Impact

Frequent analysis of student data has resulted in more focused supports for students and purposeful teacher planning and practice. Teacher voice in the implementation of school-wide goals has led to a commitment by staff to the work of the school, resulting in modifications to teacher practice and improved goal setting for students. However, at this time, teachers lack trust that allows them to fully engage in work that focuses on shared improvements in teacher practices.

Supporting Evidence

- Vertical teams by content are one configuration of professional collaboration within the school. This team works to ensure alignment of curriculum and this year they worked in cycles to analyze teacher practice and student work within the three instructional foci. As a result, teacher work has demonstrated growth in planning for student-to-student discussion and group work as well as planning to foster the use of academic vocabulary in all content areas. For example, the lead math team has established consistent math talk prompts and grade level academic vocabulary lists that are used within and across grades.
- Members of the teacher leader team have participated in the citywide teacher leadership program and use the protocols and structured approach to run the school based professional learning communities. These teacher leaders gather data from their colleagues and develop action plans for the teams they support centered on improving practice within the school's instructional focus. For example, the school wide focus of collaborative group work and discussion led to a teacher facilitated professional learning community centered on the Kagan program building cooperative learning strategies across the school.
- Inter-visitation is an integral part of the professional learning communities within the school. Teacher leaders conduct trainings on targeted areas of instruction and then "coach into" classes with their colleagues who choose to participate. There is also time for teachers to observe teacher leads in a particular area of focus. Areas include, use of thinking maps, student group work and multiple entry to meet the needs of English language learners (ELLs).
- Although teachers meet weekly by grade, evaluate student work products, align these outcomes to their curricular and instructional decisions and the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards and can highlight how teacher teams have allowed them to be more reflective around their practice, teachers are not working systematically to triangulate data, instruction and student learning in order to build shared improvements in practice. For example, in one teacher team observed, teachers all brought student work from their class from a common task distributed throughout the grade. The team did not have access to work other than their own students and they spoke to how they thought their students were doing. Although they all shared multiple practices that could work to support each student, the team did not decide on a common practice to try as part of inquiry. One teacher stated "We plan together and then go our separate ways".

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and teachers have worked within teacher teams to further organize and align curriculum and tasks to the Common Core Learning Standards and to meet the diverse needs of students. The analysis of data and student work plays a key role in planning and refining of units and tasks to provide access and engagement for all learners.

Impact

Rigorous curricular design has resulted in coherent instruction across grade levels and closing achievement gaps for the school's lowest performing students in literacy. Additionally, all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities are gaining deep content knowledge and more challenging standards based tasks as evident in student writing, math portfolios and work products throughout the school.

Supporting Evidence

- After piloting the Ready Gen program and seeing significant progress in learning levels and growth on the New York state English Language Arts exam, the school fully implemented Ready Gen program school-wide and infused more rigorous writing units and the use of thinking maps, Foundations and an additional RTI program to support letter and sound recognition and parts of speech. For example, following the Election Day professional development around planning and developing more rigorous tasks, second grade teachers revised tasks around character traits to include using thinking maps to not only identify specific qualities of characters, but to also use text based evidence to support their reasoning. Students then had to identify the trait they felt was most important and support their claim.
- The school has developed and implemented a book of the month curriculum aligned to Habits of Mind and college and career readiness standards. Examples of themes include persistence, thinking about thinking, and applying past knowledge to new situations. Students engage in standards aligned writing tasks within and across grades aligned to these topics. For example, aligned to the character trait "listening and speaking with empathy" students read "*The Day the Crayons Quit*" by Drew Daywatt. Students were asked to analyze how feelings were expressed in the text and use evidence to support their opinions.
- Included in the science Foss program is a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and next generation science standards to blend technology with science and math curriculum. Students are using Learning .com, an on-line resource to engage in inquiry-based projects using technology to conduct research around real world challenges and experiments. An example includes a unit on inventions where students were asked to think about a real world problem and create a solution. Examples of problems they tackled were ways to make your back pack lighter and how to create natural lipstick.
- The math vertical team has analyzed student data such as state test scores, pre and post unit assessments and Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) tasks in order to ensure alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and the standards of math practice. Results from these tools guide them in the design of units and tasks that address key standards and skills, For example, in order to build fluency and number sense skills for students, teachers have incorporated number strings into daily math routines. Additionally, tasks are intentionally designed with open-ended math problems to allow for multiple entry and access to rigor across grades. For example, tasks for English Language Learners are in their native language and picture supports and sentence starters are included to support struggling learners.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school has collaboratively developed assessment tools and rubrics with students, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards that accurately measure student progress, impact of curricular choices, instructional decisions and cultural norms exist within and across grades and content areas. Teachers have clear practices where they check for student understanding within lessons and make adjustments as necessary.

Impact

As a result of consistent assessment practices, teachers have a clear understanding of student progress, share a common language with their students and students are aware of the steps necessary in order to improve their work habits, work products, and overall learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers in all grades use Ready Gen, Go Math, Foundations assessments, Teachers College running record data, science benchmarks designed by the vertical team and MOSL writing to measure student progress, as well as to benchmark school-wide goals throughout the year. Data collection is stored in Google Docs, an on-line resource, for teacher teams to monitor during their inquiry work.
- There is a school wide culture of using rubrics and checklists in order to monitor work throughout a unit or task, to provide relevant feedback to students and to measure student achievement and mastery of goals. For example, in writing, students refer to the progression checklists to measure their work against standards, grade levels and writing traits. The school has also developed other rubrics for students to measure their learning. For example, thinking map rubrics, group work rubrics, and problem solving rubrics, are ways for them to measure progress during cluster periods. During the small group meeting with students and review of work products across grades and contents, students were able to identify their strengths and areas they needed to grow using these tools.
- Across classrooms, teachers monitored student group work by charting and isolating skills within tasks aligned to units of study for individual students in their classes. There was also evidence of teachers using post it notes, student self-reflections such as “I was wondering and I can justify boxes” and student/teacher conference notes to measure student progress or areas of need. In reviewing samples of student work in a fifth grade class, students had to write a research paper regarding challenges faced by scientists. One student’s self-reflection focused on close reading, pulling relevant evidence from the text to support a claim and elaborating on quotes. Using feedback from her teacher, the student also gave herself next steps which focused on targeted proofreading to look for these areas of weakness.
- The principal and her leadership cabinet monitor student progress within and across grades by tracking progress by class and unit of study. They monitor percentage of students who made progress, percentage of students who stayed the same and percentage of students who made negative progress. This data is used to make decisions around effectiveness of curricula alignment and to support teachers, teams, grades or whole school by increasing professional development opportunities around areas of need. For example, when MOSL and post unit assessment data revealed gaps in organization and structure in student writing, the principal and instructional cabinet implemented the thinking maps initiative that has led to student growth in this writing trait.

Findings

The school has established consistent beliefs of how students learn best supported through a normed understanding of Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*. Staff has explored instructional strategies and practices that provide access and opportunities for student thinking and participation in their learning. However, not all teachers have fully implemented enrichment activities to address the instructional needs of advanced learners.

Impact

As a result of these shared beliefs and school-wide pedagogical expectations, all students, including ELLs and struggling learners, have multiple opportunities and access that allows them to actively engage and participate in their learning leading to increased communication, collaboration and academic vocabulary skills and demonstrated improvements in their work products and group discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- The school-wide culture of how students learn best is exemplified across classrooms in the belief that all students should have access to rigorous curriculum. This was demonstrated in the school-wide use of thinking maps to help students visualize their thinking. Teachers and students have clear understandings of when to use particular maps and plan appropriately. Throughout the school, there were samples of student mapping that demonstrated point of view, logical questioning, comparing and contrasting, sequencing, cause and effect and parts/whole relationships.
- In all classrooms, students worked in groups and had a variety of opportunities to engage in discussions and make judgments about their learning. Group expectations included implementation of the instructional shifts, such as text-based answers, writing from sources and effective use of academic vocabulary. One second grade classroom observed was entirely student-directed and students engaged in a discussion around who they felt were important leaders throughout history. Students used discussion checklists and linguistic frame prompts to state their claim for their leader and text-based evidence to support it. Other students who disagreed with their peer's point of view provided text based evidence to offer a counter argument to support their leader. All students were able to engage in the lesson including first and second year English language learners, as they were active participants in group discussions.
- The school has been growing in math pedagogy with consistent best practices using mental number strings, problem solving "I can" checklists to guide students in their thinking and tasks that require students to apply math content to real world situations. In one math classroom visited, students were asked to use fractions to divide a piece of land to create a garden that required them to grow a variety of vegetables.
- School leaders continually monitor teacher growth within the domains of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and provide professional learning opportunities for whole staff and teacher teams. When the principal analyzed school-wide Advance teacher reports that demonstrated a decline in teacher ratings in Domain 1-planning and preparation, she collected and reviewed teacher's lesson plans and tasks and provided supports and professional development in this area. This focus led to improvements in teacher understanding of key components within designing coherent instruction that allowed them to implement the curriculum more successfully.
- Although across classrooms teacher's demonstrated practices and routines that provided multiple entry points and supports for all learners, some classrooms did not provide extensions to support high achievers within the school to push their thinking. For example, in one math classroom observed, students engaged in a task where they received a budget and had to plan an event. The lesson did not include opportunities for advanced learners to move beyond the simple menu items offered in the task, lowering expectations and preventing them from engaging in deeper thinking within this activity.