



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

J.H.S. 157 Stephen A. Halsey

**Middle School Q157
63-55 102nd Street**

**Queens
NY, 11374**

**Principal: Vincent Suraci
Date of Review: January 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Joseph O'Brien**

The School Context

J.H.S. 157 Stephen A. Halsey is a middle school with 1468 students from grade 6 through 9. The school population comprises 13% Black, 22% Hispanic, 40% White, and 23% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 12% 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 94.0%.

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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core learning standards (CCLS) and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact

The school's use of engaging and rigorous curricula for all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), results in coherent instruction, where students demonstrate their thinking across grades and subject areas while promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- All grade teams have created vertically aligned curriculum maps in grades six through ninth grade. Curriculum maps reflect grade level curricula, standards indicators, essential questions, related tasks and end of unit assessments. The curriculum maps list a menu of complex texts, skills and challenging vocabulary. For example, grade seven maps indicate a balance of informational and literary texts, citation of textual evidence, multistep word problems and use of academic vocabulary.
- Text-based answers figure predominantly in all curricula and tasks requiring evidentiary arguments in writing to assess textual comprehension were seen. For example, in grades 6-8, maps indicate emphasis on writing and specific writing tasks in English as well as science and social studies.
- The instructional shifts are strategically addressed in the curriculum. Each grade level requires a "step" of growth on the "staircase" to prepare students for the complexity of college and career ready texts. Students read grade appropriate text around which instruction is centered and multiple entry points are created into lesson plans. Adapted tasks and scaffolds for ELLs and SWDs were seen in activities including total physical response, teacher created graphic organizers, and strategies to pre-teach vocabulary.
- Supports for ELLs, SWDs, and advanced students are listed in curriculum maps and unit plans. The school has created curricula for honors, general education, students with disabilities and English language learners and list scaffolds and supports including identifying academic vocabulary strategies and tiered writing tasks for each subgroup and level organized in distinct curricular binders.
- Lesson plans in all content areas include a menu of student strategies in completing tasks that require higher order thinking. For example in English language arts, students in one of five pre-selected groups studied dramatic irony and sought textual examples in pre-selected chunks of text tiered by difficulty.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for teaching and the instructional shifts as well as by discussions at the team and school level.

Across the vast majority of classrooms teaching strategies including questioning scaffolds, and routines that strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula.

Impact

Teacher practice across most classrooms ensures all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher order thinking skills in student work products. Students with disabilities, English-language learners and advanced students are provided multiple entry points, high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula, resulting in meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In seven of seven classes visited, instruction incorporated the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts and was informed by the Danielson Framework for teaching. For example, in English language arts (ELA), students analyzed their peer writing in tasks and evaluated textual evidence from a non-fiction article using a rubric and graphic organizer. In sixth grade math, students in triads determined the percent of a given quantity using proportions and equations.
- Students in five of seven classes worked on collaborative activities with specific roles in flexible groups based on student data. For example in ELA, students used pivotal questions to analyze chunks of text from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* then self-assessed their comprehension.
- In seven of seven classes visited, students worked on tasks tiered by difficulty level. For example, in one seventh grade ELA class, students worked collaboratively in groups predetermined by data to practice "determining the meaning of unfamiliar words" in tiered multiple choice questions. Additionally, students in seventh grade math worked on one of three group tasks containing two complex, multistep word problems tiered by difficulty.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms, students used discussion prompts including "I agree with her because...", and "I disagree because the supporting evidence reveals..." to better engage in student to student discussions, thereby raising the level of academic rigor in their discourse.
- In the majority of classrooms, teachers stepped out of their mediating, central role and facilitated learning opportunities through student discussions and engaging tasks. For example in math, students in flexible groups engaged in a debate as to the validity of a peer's strategy to solve a multistep word problem using manipulatives.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers design and use assessments, rubrics and grading policies aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress towards goals across grades and subjects, track progress, and adjust curricular and instructional decisions.

Impact

School assessments provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement across grades and subjects that leads to adjustments to meet all students' learning needs, including ELLs and SWDs to ensure there is a clear portrait of student mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams have designed a "tuning protocol" to aid in the identification of instructional gaps, provide adaptations for all students as well as refine curricular resources based on student classroom data. Teachers redesigned graphic organizers and rubrics to include thought bubbles that clarify exemplary practice. For example, a thought bubble on a concluding statement rubric notes that "The final paragraph adds to the reader's understanding by clarifying and solidifying the argument."
- Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use student data to strategically group students. The lesson plans reviewed identified student data for all students in the class. Teachers use this data to inform instructional decisions and track student progress to meet the needs of all learners leading to increased mastery of skills.
- School leaders and teacher teams designed their own assessment system known as "Prosper." Data is compiled, uploaded and analyzed to capture a clear portrait of student mastery for all students, including students with disabilities, English-language learners and advanced students.
- Teacher-teams meet weekly to revise unit maps and assessment and to discuss gaps in curriculum across grades. As a result, instruction and assessments are realigned on an ongoing basis to best meet students' needs and promote student ownership of learning and growth. For example, teacher teams meet to discuss Item Skills Analysis and to identify ways to modify instruction to best meet the needs of all students. After reviewing the data, teachers identified that ELL students were struggling with reading comprehension. Teacher teams analyzed curricular resources and added visuals to tasks, rubrics, and texts. In addition, they created sentence starters and vocabulary walls to support ELL students' comprehension of lessons.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently emphasize a culture of learning that communicates high expectations to teachers, staff, families and students, and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with parents to support student progress.

Impact:

The school's high expectations result in a culture of mutual accountability, collaboration, and buy-in on the part of teachers, leaders, and families, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to the developmental needs of all students. School leaders successively partner with families to support student independence, progress, and ownership of learning that leads to academic achievement for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus is to support teachers in developing well-designed learning opportunities that require complex thinking and results in intellectual engagement. Advance data revealed that teachers struggled with Danielson components 3b: Questioning and Discussion Techniques, 3c Engagement, and 3d Assessment. Ongoing professional learning for teachers conducted by teachers and school leaders in these components occur at least once per week.
- Teachers use "Pupil Path" as a platform to communicate with students and families and provide up to date information on social emotional and academic progress of students toward their goals. Parents shared that PupilPath information is updated daily by teachers.
- Teachers self-reflect on the effectiveness of units of study and share best practices among colleagues during weekly teacher team meetings. Topics identified by teachers that required additional refinement included questioning and discussion techniques that promoted high levels of student-to-student discourse.
- The school communicates to parents in writing on a bi-monthly basis. Grade level teacher teams create a newsletter detailing what each grade will be working on in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Also highlighted are important reminders and tips for families at home to support student progress. The principal writes a monthly newsletter to all families noting upcoming workshops, highlighting exemplary instructional practice and providing helpful hints to support learning at home.
- The school provides various parent workshops on topics such as; PupilPath, English language learner strategies, testing information, social media, CCLS math, interpreting Individual Educational Plans, and cyberbullying.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry based structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promotes the achievement of the school's goals and the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams systematically analyze assessment data and student work to adjust curricula and instruction.

Impact

Structured professional collaborations result in school wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Teacher teamwork results in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers meet weekly to design professional learning opportunities based on teacher observations data captured in the Advance system. Teachers and school leaders volunteer to lead professional learning and use teacher feedback to hone effective instructional practices, refine school level professional learning opportunities and promote inter-visitations among teachers to improve practice.
- The English language arts and social studies teacher teams meet weekly to align humanities curricula and integrate writing activities using primary and secondary nonfiction sources. English language arts teachers also provide social studies teachers with best practices in writing instruction. For example, use of textual evidence to support claims and counterclaims in argumentative essays in science and social studies were seen.
- Teacher teams systematically analyze data using the school's student management system, Prosper and training protocols to adapt, refine, and revise curricula to meet the needs of all students including ELLs and SWDs. For example, math teachers noted students were struggling with division operations. After analyzing student work products, the math team noted that students specifically struggled with the division of fractions as student work indicated student proficiency in decimal division. The team developed additional units on the division of fractions and more scaffolds and supports to meet the needs of all learners.
- Teacher leaders are given shortened programs to lead teacher teams. Teacher leaders provide side-by-side coaching, professional learning opportunities, and mentor new teachers in math and English language arts.
- Teacher teams adapt rubrics and checklists for all students including students with disabilities and English-language learners. Thought bubbles and other adaptations to teacher created assessments and tasks were seen across the vast majority of classes.