



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 159

Elementary 26Q159

**205-01 33 Avenue
Queens
NY, 11361**

Principal: Paul DiDio

**Date of review: February 2, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Danielle Giunta**

The School Context

P.S. 159 is an Elementary school with 663 students from grade prekindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 21% Hispanic, 27% White, and 47% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.5%.

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	Celebration	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:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use data and rubrics aligned to the curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teacher's assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of on-going checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teacher's assessment practices result in students receiving actionable and meaningful feedback regarding student achievement, leading to effective adjustments that meet all students learning to ensure they are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have a comprehensive set of data, which they use to track student progress in English Language Arts (ELA) and math at the school, grade and classroom level. The school has implemented beginning, middle and end of year assessments for reading, writing and math. School leaders group student data using a color code to allow teachers to access trends across classrooms and grades. Assessment data is analyzed with grade level liaisons that bring back information and strategies to their respective grades. Teacher teams use this data to determine the target populations they will study and plan for over the course of the school year.
- In writing, classroom teachers conduct an on-demand pre-assessment prior to launching a unit and use the data to adjust planning and pacing. At the conclusion of the unit, teachers assess the final published piece against the on-demand pre-assessment to track progress within a unit. Although students' published work is highly reflective of revisions based on feedback, teachers are beginning to implement an on-demand post-assessment piece that will assess the level of learning that is transferring independently without prompts, scaffolds and supports.
- Across all classrooms teachers confer with students individually and in small groups and provide feedback to students on their progress in completing a task. Students use exit slips at the conclusion of their lesson to reflect on their individual learning and teachers use these exit slips to assess student learning and adjust planning for individuals and groups of students. Teachers are beginning to embrace entrance slips as a launch, or active engagement to a specific lesson and use these slips to further assess student learning in a specific lesson.
- Students are keenly aware of their performance, goals and progress towards their individual goals through regular feedback from teachers and peers as well as embedded opportunities for self-reflection. Teachers provide rubrics at the beginning of a task and units of study so students have clear expectations of what they need to do to be successful. During the student meeting students shared how the use of feedback, checklists and rubrics has helped them make improvements to their work and allowed them to better understand what they need to do get to the next level.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best; however, there is evidence that teachers are still working through alignment of pedagogy to the rigor of the curriculum.

Impact

While across classrooms, multiple access points support student engagement in rigorous tasks; supports and extensions are not always strategically planned, so that all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities have opportunities to be highly engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school believes in productive struggle on tasks, which allow opportunities for students to develop persistence and patience. This belief was exemplified in a math class where students were engaged in an Exemplar math task that promoted discussion to solve the problem and show evidence of their reasoning. Students worked in partnerships, tried various strategies and discussed next steps in order to explain the reasoning for their response. Partnerships asked each other probing questions such as, "What did you determine the size should be?" One partnership shared how asking his partner questions, helps him understand the way his partner is thinking.
- In a 3rd grade literacy class, students were engaged in a literacy circle, where students facilitated a discussion and built conversations with one another by adding on, agreeing, and disagreeing, as well as supporting their claims with fellow students. The students were able to articulate their thoughts and used resources such as charts that had talking prompts to support their conversations. English language learners were provided a modified resource to help them participate in the conversation, however; they were no structures in place to ensure they contributed to the conversation.
- In one class, the teacher used snap cubes as a means for students to build on conversation whereby each time a student contributes ideas; a cube is stacked to reflect their thinking and facilitates equity of voice in class discussion. However, for one group of English language learners, without additional supports targeted to their needs, the snap cubes alone, were not a viable resource to promote discussion and engagement amongst them.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts using student work and data to target planning for individual and groups of students.

Impact

As a result of curricula decisions, there is coherence across grades and subject areas and all students, including the lowest and highest achieving students, have access to curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has adopted curricula for literacy and math that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. After one year of implementation, reviewing student data and eliciting teacher feedback, the school has made curricula adjustments for this school year. For example, after a full year implementing Ready Gen, teachers felt the program placed an uneven level of emphasis on writing about reading and wanted to bring balance to explicit teaching into the traits of writing. As a result, the school has implemented the Teachers College writing units of study as part of their literacy program. Similarly, in math, teachers believed the Go Math program did not offer ample opportunities for students to engage in complex math tasks that encourage children to construct viable arguments, including reasoning, proof and multiple representations, as a means to promote higher order thinking at all grade levels and decided to implement Exemplar math tasks to expose students to those skills.
- Through a shared vision to increase student-to-student discussion, teachers incorporate a minimum of two higher order thinking questions per lesson. To further support this work, the school has implemented discussion prompt charts and a variety of techniques, such as talk cubes which encourage a range of participation and conversation building. Classroom teachers have implemented conversation circles and students are provided question stems which serve as prompts to assist students in formulating their own higher order questions.
- Unit plans serve as an outline of goals and objectives for a unit of study over time. Daily lesson plans reflect a more detailed planning process inclusive of Depth of Knowledge questions, extensions and differentiated learning activities. For example, daily lesson plans incorporate learning activities for three levels of students (low- grade level- and high achievers) which mirror the target population teachers are studying in their teacher teams. For example, in one Social Studies lesson the teacher planned for three learning activities related to the Articles of Confederation, to meet the needs of three groups of students in the class. Within the lesson plan, the teacher structured tasks so that low achievers were given a main idea and asked to find supporting details, the grade level group was required to identify the main idea and supporting details and high achievers were required to identify the main idea, supporting details and to brainstorm suggestions for ways to revise the Articles of Confederation, so that there would be fewer problems for the national government.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations around professionalism, instruction, and communication to the entire staff through professional learning opportunities. School leaders and staff communicate expectations to families connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support high expectations assure a culture of mutual accountability. Parents have a clear understanding of how to fully support their children which enables students to exceed expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have incorporated systems and supports, such as frequent cycles of observations, inter-visitations and aligning the professional learning plan of the school, which communicate high expectations around planning. Teachers plan explicitly for a minimum of two higher order thinking questions within their lesson plans. In collaboration with grade leaders, school leaders developed a higher order thinking question prompt chart to support their planning process. In turn, teachers developed question decks and a student friendly version of the chart, so that students have a support in developing their own higher order thinking questions, which have resulted in richer class discussions. As a result of high expectations and strategic systems and supports, this work is now taking root and teachers and students are less reliant on these scaffolds.
- Teachers feel a mutual accountability in meeting and contributing to the expectations and vision of the school leaders. As a result of high levels of trust, teachers value the feedback they receive from school leaders and feel comfortable sharing with and learning from their colleagues. For example, one teacher shared she received feedback from school leaders to increase opportunities for student discussion. School leaders encouraged the teacher to visit a colleague who was excelling in this area. The teacher described the inter-visitation as powerful and requested the opportunity to bring her whole class to visit and fishbowl the conversation. As a result of seeing this work in action for herself and with her students, the class has successfully launched student-led conversation circles.
- School leaders and staff provide ample opportunities to communicate expectations and partner with families which include: progress reports, meet the teacher night, newsletters, academic and social-emotional workshops, workshops targeting parents of English language learners, and workshops to help parents of fifth graders complete middle school applications. During the parent meeting, parents spoke highly of the informal bi-monthly *Can We Talk?* open forum between school leaders, the parent coordinator and parents. During this time, parents are able to express their compliments, concerns and suggestions regarding the school curricula and policies. Parents feel they have a voice and contribute to the overall vision of the school. During this forum a parent expressed a need to design a series of workshops supporting parents of students with disabilities. As a result, the school has partnered with this parent and workshops are scheduled to begin this school year.

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

The vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based teacher team work to analyze student work and teacher practice. Distributed leadership structures are embedded across the school.

Impact

The work of teacher teams results in the strengthening of teacher instructional capacity and teams play an integral role in key school decisions and deepening the study of the needs of individual students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has structures in place to allow for professional collaborations. Teacher teams meet to promote the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. School leaders have organized the schedule to allow for each grade to meet for a minimum of two common planning periods per week in addition to utilizing professional learning time on Monday and Tuesday afternoons. During this time, teachers plan units of study, review and revise lesson plans, analyze student work and create assessments focusing on a diversity of learners. For example, during an observed meeting, teachers studied student work samples for a range of learners including low achieving, on grade level and high-achieving. Teachers came to the meeting having already analyzed the student work and focused their time highlighting strategies the student had mastered as well as brainstorming teaching practices to address areas students are struggling in or are ready for.
- Through their participation in the Learning Partners Program, school leaders identified a group of teachers from the vertical Literacy Liaison team, who meet monthly to analyze student data and trends across all grade levels and weekly with their grade level teams. Although a relatively new team to the school, this team has had an immediate impact on professional learning, teacher practice, assessments and student learning. For example, this team has helped glean curricula gaps across grades, such as the curricula programs emphasis on writing about reading and not on teaching explicitly into the craft of writing across a variety of genres and is working to strengthen coherency across the school by incorporating and aligning the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project units of study in writing to their core curricula literacy program.
- Through the structure of the vertical team, school leaders have empowered teachers to play an integral role in key decisions. For example, school leaders met with the vertical team to design an assessment calendar for the school. Vertical team members shared the calendar with their respective grades asking for feedback. Teachers provided feedback to their grade level representatives resulting in adjustments to the assessment calendar for the year. As a result, the school has prioritized the data that will be collected to align to the school's goals. This has allowed school leaders and teachers to focus on student progress.
- School leaders have prioritized literacy as a focus area for the school. As such, all teacher teams are organized to focus on student writing. In the kindergarten teacher team, teachers analyzed student writing across units one and two as they prepared to enter the planning stage for their third unit. Using a T-Chart graphic organizer, the team brainstormed student strengths and areas to focus on. Together, teachers developed a list of skills and strategies to incorporate into the unit plan, lesson plans and small group instruction.