

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Samantha Smith

Elementary School Q182

**153-27 88th Avenue
Queens
NY 11432**

Principal: Andrew Topol

**Date of review: March 4, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Marion Wilson**

The School Context

The Samantha Smith School is a/an elementary school with 951 students from grade Kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 16% Black, 54% Hispanic, 1% White, and 26% Asian students. The student body includes 31% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.5%.

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	Focus	Proficient
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	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 or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. In addition, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

High quality assessment practices provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Additionally, teachers continue to find new ways to make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are actively involved in the collection of information from baseline, benchmark, unit and reading assessments, and provide input. Students keep journals, notes, and portfolios, and track their work using student-friendly checklists for projects, homework assignments, and informal as well as formal exams. Students are aware of their next learning steps, and can articulate clearly what they need to do and will do to make improvements. For example, in the small student group meeting, one fourth grade student stated, "In groups, we give each other feedback on things that we might not have thought of and that makes sense. When we go back to redo our work and look at the checklist, we know what we did wrong and get a better grade."
- The school creates and graphs to depict a clear picture of student performance and progress by mathematical strand. For example, in February, the second grade team completed graphs by student on the results from their students' understanding of addition and place value broken down by accuracy, strategy use, and representation and communication of the topic.
- Teachers and administrators articulate coherent reasons for assessment choices. Assessments are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and content standards across content curricula. These choices deliver a range of data, some daily, some monthly, and some quarterly, to sustain collaborative inquiry and continuously improve instruction. The school uses running records, daily conferences with students, collection of student work samples, performance assessments, end of unit assessments, teacher-created assessments, as well as rubrics and checklists to continue their efforts to provide a laser-like focus on determining student mastery of subjects.
- Teacher monitoring of student understanding during lessons is visibly active and continuous. Teachers were observed "taking the pulse" of the class, and making frequent use of strategies such as questioning for explanation, thumbs up and down, stop and jots, parking lot post its, dry erase slates, and exit slips. These strategies are used by teachers to gather information about individual and groups of students understanding and learning trends. In turn, teachers identify the specific needs of all students to modify instruction and accelerate progress for those who need it or provide additional support for others.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core learning standards (CCLS) and integrate the instructional shifts and ensure that curricula and academic tasks are rigorous, accessible for English language learners and students with disabilities, and refined by teachers based on student assessment data.

Impact

While rigorous habits and higher order skills including those for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities are somewhat consistently emphasized in curricula and academic tasks across grades and subjects with some maps noting detailed supports, enrichment activities didn't include examples of potential higher level thinking questions.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty align curricula to Common Core learning standards and create curriculum maps. The school provides ongoing professional learning opportunities once per month with Network support on adapting Teachers College Reading & Writing Project Curricula for literacy and Investigations for mathematics on creating scaffolds and supports for advanced students, ELLs and students with disabilities; however additional work is needed so that this results in coherency across grades and subjects.
- Curricula have been developed to consistently emphasize rigorous tasks for most subjects and grades. For example, curriculum maps in first grade math incorporate the use of textual evidence, multi-step word problems, academic vocabulary and Listen and Draw/Model and Draw activities to scaffold instruction for all students including ELLs and students with disabilities. ELL supports include identifying number sentences that don't belong in sets of three, identifying numeral relationships, and the use of manipulatives were planned into lessons.
- Grade level teacher teams meet informally during common prep periods and formally meet once per week to adapt and refine curricula from Teachers College Reading & Writing Project Curricula and Investigations. Curriculum maps reviewed included scripted supports for students with disabilities and ELLs, enrichment activities for advanced students and examples of potential higher level thinking questions such as "How does the model help you solve the problem?" and "how is this problem like the last problem? How is it different?"

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teacher pedagogy center around a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Teacher pedagogy is aligned to the curricula and meets the needs of most learners so that students produce meaningful work products.

Impact

As a result, teaching practices support instruction for students through small groups, differentiated activities, and active student conversations, with discussion protocols where students can be active participants in their own learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Students in most classrooms had assigned roles, which they were accustomed to using to help facilitate group/table assignments. Students were consistently asked to justify their answers and support their thinking, however in some classes visited, classrooms were teacher centered and students were not given authentic opportunities to share with each other or participate in the conversation. In another upper grade music classroom, students were working in groups, based on ability, interest, and teacher recommendation to tell a story through the use of percussion instruments. Students used a rubric and worked together to make decisions about their pieces as well as explain their thinking for the various components of their original musical composition.
- Most classrooms had students questioning each other or responding to prompts from the teacher. The discussions included multiple entry points for English language learners and Students with Disabilities, with differentiated question stems and scaffolds, so that they could complete classroom activities on their learning targets. For example, in a third grade math class, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher pushes in to support the class and support student work and understanding. Students were asked to recognize and generate simple equivalent fractions and explain why the fractions were equivalent by using visual models. Students were using pizza shapes as manipulatives, which were cut in different sizes to help them show various visual representations of equivalent fractions with written explanations.
- Teachers used technology such as Smart boards, document cameras, and laptops to provide visual aids to students to present content in various forms. In addition, across classrooms, the Smartboard was used to help students see visual models of activities. For example, in a 2nd grade reading and writing lesson, students were asked to think about a character from a series and form an opinion of them based on their actions from the student and use text evidence. The teacher modeled her thinking through use of a graphic organizer example on the board to help students see what was expected of them.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness, and successfully partner with families to support student progress. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance supports to ensure that students own their educational experience.

Impact

The school's communication has improved the awareness of families and students of the high expectations for student progress. The quality of student work and performance on state exams is improving and students are able to work to their highest level of performance.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides a handbook and frequent grade specific newsletters to the parents. They include information about the standards as well as ways parents can support their children at home. The school uses comprehensive tools to communicate with parents with input from all constituents, including teachers and parents. The school also has a parent coordinator and guidance team that help get students and their families become acclimated and adjusted to the school community.
- Frequent parent workshops on topics such as the Common Core Learning Standards, homework help, study skills, state assessments, as well as on bully prevention support the parents to help them ensure their children's mastery of the Common Core Learning Standards. The workshops also address the social and emotional needs of students. Parents have a voice in the selection of topics and they help to facilitate sessions. The school surveys parents throughout the year to identify areas of need and success and has monthly Family Mornings, where parents are invited to learn alongside their children in class and attend follow-up workshops.
- Feedback to students is provided informally through regular feedback sessions. For example student friendly rubrics have been developed in all subjects, clearly establishing the criteria for exemplary, high-quality standards of work and performance. Students are aware of their strengths and next steps for growth, and are actively involved in reflection and self-assessment of their work.
- The school exposes students to developing habits of mind that promote student success, such as teamwork, perseverance, and self-discipline as shared by teachers, parents, and students in meetings. In addition, personal habits of self-regulation are messaged to all students.

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

Teacher teams engage in structured professional collaborations using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning.

Impact

Professional collaborations have resulted in improved teacher practice in teacher questioning and discussion and teachers being able to assess their students' understanding. In addition, these structures have led to teachers having a voice in key decisions that directly impact student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- During team meetings, teachers utilize protocols, such as warm and cool feedback to discuss student performance on tasks in mathematics and English language arts, as well as next steps and implications for teacher classroom practice with an action plan and target dates. During an observed meeting, teachers were charting the responses after examining a cross sample of student responses to the latest administered performance task. They compared findings for the lower and top groups of students.
- Teams are able to share with one another in a risk-free environment, while engaging in frequent inter-visitations that provide critical feedback to one another. For example, teachers completed a PD survey in January and indicated needing additional support in deepening cognitive engagement for higher performing students in the classrooms. Teachers shared that the visits were arranged to focus on questioning and discussion. In addition, pre-planned questions written in lesson plans are tiered and allow the teacher to strategically use questioning to gather information about student learning. There is also the use of a discussion checklist that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, which allows for analysis of student discourse as a result of strategic questioning.
- Administration and teachers offer specific and clear examples of teacher leadership that illustrate how teachers and teacher leaders play a vital role in school level decision making, as evidenced by the literacy coach becoming the assistant principal this year.