



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Russell Sage

Middle School Q190

**68-17 Austin Street
Queens
NY 11375**

Principal: Marilyn Grant

**Date of review: March 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Mabel Muñoz- Sarduy**

The School Context

Russell Sage is a junior high school with 1,040 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 9% Black, 27% Hispanic, 30% White, 30% Asian, and 4% Multi-Racial students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.0%.

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	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	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	Proficient
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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and strategically embed the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are consistently emphasized for all learners across grades and content areas.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions result in coherence across grades and subjects areas that promote college and career readiness for all students including English language learners and students with disabilities. Student work products reflect rigorous habits and high levels of student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Expeditionary Learning for reading, Glencoe Math, Connected Math Project 3 (CMP3), social studies frameworks and Urban Advantage for science. These materials provide for multiply ways for students to express their thinking. The coherence of curriculum for instruction throughout the grades and subjects provides the students with opportunities to make their thinking visible by having many opportunities for students to explain their thinking in writing, through hands-on experiences or expressing their thoughts to their peers. These opportunities allow for college and career readiness for all students.
- Lesson plans in all content areas include an objective, standards, rationale, grouping, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels of questions and differentiation for all learners including students with disabilities and English language earners (ELLs). For example, one plan included tasks for different groups of students where each group were assigned math problems that required them to solve algebraic equations at varying levels, based on students' skill sets. One problem included students having to set up an equation to determine which variables were rational and non-integers. Other problems included a set rate of growth, with a predator that would be introduced into the environment and cause the rate of growth to change. Other groups had a problem in which they had to set up an equation in the form of a rational or non-integer; providing an example of how teachers under the school leadership, promote college and career readiness for all students.
- Unit plans in all content areas illustrate multiple designs of academic tasks, with scaffolds and entry points for all students including students with disabilities SWDs and ELLs. For example, in a grade 6 English unit of study, the teacher included multiple means of representation such as pictures, sentence frames, fact question prompts, essential questions, guiding questions and differentiated DOK questions ranging from levels 1-4. Teacher experts in special education and English as a second language plan together with content and grade level teachers to provide support for teachers and build upon strategies and skills to support students. This planning of strategies build upon the repertoire of strategies teachers can use and illustrates the school's decisions in building coherence across grades of support materials and strategies for all students, including high achievers.

Area of Focus

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

A majority of the teachers participate in professional teamwork that promotes the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Teacher teams analyze key elements to analyze student work and data.

Impact

Professional collaborations have strengthened teacher practice and contributed to the progress towards goals for groups of students. However, not all students have demonstrated increased academic achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly to examine student data and student work and make adjustments to lessons to ensure that they are meeting students' needs. For example, in a teacher team meeting, a teacher shared the adjustments which were made for English Language Arts (ELA). Some scaffolds were blurb starters such as; to Persuade: Do you want to add years to your life and feel better in addition to that; here are a few tips, because it's all about how you eat... to inform: Many researchers have long been fascinated by the way human beings eat and what compels people to choose their daily menus... and to entertain: My family and I love throwing parties on a regular basis; the food that we will serve at the party plays a huge role in our planning process... This scaffold helped different learners understand the different genres of writing. After review of student writing teachers saw and articulated an increase of the quality of writing within the different genres. Students articulated a better understanding of the kinds of writing, including students who wrote in their second language.
- Teacher teams promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards through collaborative standards- based planning. Teacher teams meet to discuss the alignment of lessons based on Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) outcomes, midterm analysis to revise and adjust plans, adjustments for ELLs and students with disabilities. During one of the observed teacher team meetings, teachers shared one of their units and the results of midterms which showed progress for some groups of students. However in the ELA distribution scores, ELLs and students with disabilities did not make enough progress towards meeting the standards.
- Teachers meet on a weekly basis to align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards, instructional shifts and the results of student data. Teachers articulated that students struggled in ELA with expanding ideas. Teachers shared a constructive model where students used text boxes to expand or explain their ideas. Teachers noticed that students were able to pull out text and cite evidence, but still had difficulty explaining in their own words. Teachers decided they needed to continue to use research- based strategies to ensure students are able to elaborate their ideas. The results of post-writing assessments showed the impact of growth in student writing. Teachers, as well as school leaders, articulated the impact of teacher teams on teacher pedagogy and student learning outcomes.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Pedagogy provides consistent teaching practices that are aligned to curricula and reflect and articulate a set of beliefs about how students learn using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Across classrooms, teacher pedagogy is informed by the instructional shifts of the Common Core Learning Standards, with scaffolds for support, which allow students to produce meaningful work products. However, there are missed opportunities for discussions that reflect student ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's focus on Danielson's Framework for Teaching component 3B: Questioning and Discussion has provided opportunities for students to reflect on their thinking and participation, as well as continued opportunities to engage in questioning one another. Administrators articulated this is an ongoing opportunity for teachers and students. For example, in a 7th grade math class, students were asked to recognize, create and analyze equivalent expressions and equations. In this classroom, students had three different levels of equivalent expressions with questions ranging from level 1-4 in the DOK matrix. One group had scaffolds with vocabulary and formulas to determine area of rectangle and perimeter. Another group of students had to explain their answers and find the value of the variable. The third group had to design a word problem and write an algebraic expression that represents it and then write the expression in two different ways. Students were able to express their thinking to each other, as well as question the process of their thinking.
- In an ELA classroom, students were asked to analyze how text features support arguments by completing a sidebar task card based on the sidebars in the article "The Exterminator". Grouping was based on an argument essay completed at the end of a unit assessment which focused on developing arguments, claims and providing evidence from the text. The teacher grouped two students who had difficulty analyzing arguments and two students who analyzed arguments well. However, opportunities for student extensions and ownership of their work, was not captured during this lesson.
- In a Science lab classroom, students were able to articulate the key features to describe their animals. Students were working in groups and students articulated their expertise around math and science, precision and measurement, observational skills and diagrams. Based on the articulated expertise, each student was grouped according to their strengths. These roles allowed for student ownership within their expertise. The teacher articulated these roles were based on data she reviews in both science and math.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school uses common assessments, rubrics, goals and grading policies that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards to track student progress, which offers a clear portrait of student mastery.

Impact

The use of data from various assessments has resulted in instructional and curricular revisions, actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement, which has allowed all learners to demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses common pre and post assessments in writing to review the progress of writing by reviewing student work products and provides opportunities for students to articulate and share their goals within their writing pieces. Some examples, was the scoring of goals in student writing where they rated the areas of: focus, evidence, articles, conventions and organization. A student wrote “my strength was focusing on the topic and providing good evidence to support my claim. My weakness is organization and conventions. I plan to reread my essay carefully to check for grammar and spelling mistakes.” These goals were set from specific rubrics aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards with actionable and meaningful feedback from their teachers, which allowed students to be able to articulate as their next steps for areas of focus & structure, introduction, evidence, conclusion, and style. These rubrics were aligned to student topics, student goals and the school’s grading policy, as evident in student writing folders, classroom bulletin boards and across subject areas.
- Teachers shared during an inquiry team meeting that they revise units of study based on data from pre-assessments of student writing. The pre-assessment data showed the need for students to understand how to organize their thoughts and counter-claims. As a result, a unit on counter-claims, using the story “*The Odyssey*”, was created where a graphic organizer with boxes to include the introduction, two to four body paragraphs which included a topic sentence for each paragraph, additional sentences included evidence, explanation, the claims and conclusion, which restated the main argument. Student data was reviewed and showed mastery of argumentative writing for most students. Students articulated how this organizer helped them organize their thoughts.
- A review of bulletin boards in and outside of the classroom, student work had actionable and meaningful feedback from teachers as well as a task and rubric aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. One example of teacher feedback was “To further develop your position, track the details and think about how the traits reflect the actions of Odysseus then explain”. Students were able to articulate during student meeting how helpful it was to use a rubric and get feedback in order to improve their writing.
- A review of English Language Arts distribution data from grades 6- 8 for the first term showed that 90% of the students were exceeding the standards in ELA for levels 2-4 and 66% were almost on track for high school readiness. This tracking supports the school’s efforts in targeting students in need of additional resources.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

High expectations are consistently messaged to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching in trainings and other modes of communication. Workshops and performance updates keep families apprised of student progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations build buy-in and accountability amongst staff, students and their families, thus providing a clear path towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Parent workshops provide information of exam expectations to meet the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), post-secondary preparation, specialized High School requirements, school tours, and financial planning. Parents shared that teachers and supervisors offer guidance and support and regularly send updates on their child's progress via monthly reports, report cards, phone calls and email outreach.
- Frequent classroom observations, peer visitations and feedback from classroom visits hold staff accountable for high expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Professional development is a shared responsibility of teachers and supervisors. Teachers of different content areas and expertise meet to share best practices for planning. Some topics of professional learning include those on higher-order thinking/ questions, evaluating data to create action plans, aligning ELA strategies with social studies content, and student-led conversations. These topics are selected by a committee based on student and teacher needs.
- The student-led conference faculty handbook provides a clear description of conferences which lead to building ownership and relationships between students', families and staff. Some objectives outlined in this handbook are to increase student accountability and autonomy concerning academics and their habits of work and learning, to hone in on students' verbal communication and critical thinking about his/her learning, to build open relationships with families concerning student progress and to teach students how to persuade by substantiating claims with evidence. These skills are tied to the Common Core Learning Standards, as well as college and career readiness.