



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Elm Tree School

Elementary School Q211

**86-37 53rd Avenue
Queens
NY 11373**

Principal: Donna Estro

**Date of review: March 12, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Shirley Wheeler-Massey**

The School Context

P.S. 211 is an elementary school with 217 students from kindergarten through grade 1. The school population comprises 5% Black, 88% Hispanic, 1% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 67% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	Developing
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	Developing
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	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

Teachers across the school engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations to analyze student work, alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and assessment data and share best teaching practices.

Impact

Professional collaborations have provided opportunities for teachers to hone their skills, which have resulted in progress in student learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- Kindergarten and grade 1 teachers meet a minimum of twice per week in grade and vertical teams to collaboratively look at student work and data, to identify problems in student understanding or teaching practice and to make adjustments to their instruction, curriculum maps or academic tasks. Grade team meetings are teacher-led and are an opportunity for teachers to develop and share strategies they have used or believe will address targeted problems identified in their analysis of assessment data and alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, teachers discuss implications for their teaching and next steps to support student learning across the grade and the school.
- During an observed meeting, kindergarten teachers were engaged in inquiry work where they were analyzing a recently administered math assessment and looking at each of their students' assessments to identify specific skills they were having challenges with. In addition, the team developed a graph of the assessment outcomes and identified several questions that were a trend for misunderstanding across the grade. In partnerships, teachers discussed the analysis of their classes' data and shared strategies they would employ to address the gaps in learning. Each partnership shared their findings and strategies with the whole grade and developed a grade-wide action plan that consisted of the identified problems, the strategies they would implement and the next steps for additional support and then re-assessment within four weeks. During this timeframe, teachers agreed they would identify and share additional resources and provide small group instruction to support students' needs.
- Within grade and vertical team meetings, teachers are focused on developing strategies to support the needs of their large English language learner (ELL) population. As a dual language school, they are consistently developing, revising and analyzing assessments and their practice as a means to collectively strengthen their own skills, so they may support the diverse needs of their students. Teachers expressed that having the opportunity to meet regularly with their colleagues and to visit each other's classrooms, has helped them hone in on their teaching practice and to better support their students. As a result of their collaborative work and a focus on a "problem of practice", teachers have been able to see progress with 50% of their students mastering blending techniques to make words, such as in the -at, -et and -it families, with the other half being able to identify letters and their sounds.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching practices are becoming aligned to the school's beliefs around student learning, however, the use of multiple entry points and scaffolds to support student learning are inconsistent across classrooms.

Impact

While some teachers are beginning to employ strategies that support student learning, the inconsistencies within their practice has hindered students' opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking within their work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's beliefs are that in order for students to learn, they should be provided opportunities to engage in student discussions through partnerships, turn and talks or small group discussions and be exposed to learning through technology. Additionally, the school has focused on teacher questioning using the "5 Powerful Question" protocol, where teachers can utilize the generic open-ended questions to push student discussions and thinking. While in some classrooms visited, students were observed engaging in meaningful turn and talks, small group discussions, with some opportunities to share their thinking during whole group share-outs, this was not consistently observed across classrooms visited. In one classroom, within partnerships, students discussed the facts they identified within the shared reading text they were reading, followed by a sharing of ideas within the whole class discussion. However, in another classroom, the majority of students worked independently on a writing task and were not encouraged or provided an opportunity to discuss their work with their peers and instructed to get a book to read, if they were completed with the task.
- This year, the school's instructional focus is on differentiated instruction to support all learners' needs. During visits to classrooms, most teachers provided visual supports, aids and prompts on the SMARTboards, as well as introduced new academic vocabulary to assist students with learning. However, multiple points of entry were inconsistently provided to students across the classrooms visited. For example, in one classroom, students worked in small groups solving and discussing different math problems, while the high achievers who had previously completed the task, were assigned the task of creating their own math story problems. While in another classroom, students worked on the same writing task, with the same sentence prompts and supports, with high achievers given little opportunity to be creative or stretch their thinking and ideas without sentence starters or stems.
- While differentiation of instruction is the focus for the year, teachers are having challenges ensuring that this practice is consistently embedded within their lessons. For example, in one classroom students worked on a writing task, that allowed them to choose one of many different community workers they would write about and were given an opportunity to share their work during a whole group discussion, while in another kindergarten classroom, students who were assigned the same writing task. Students were disengaged, unfocused and wandered around the classroom, looking for various scaffolds to support their writing.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school effectively implements curricula that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards with integration of the instructional shifts. Teachers utilize student work and data to develop and refine curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

The collaborative design and refinement of curricula and academic tasks has built coherence across grades so that all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are exposed to engaging learning experiences.

Supporting Evidence

- As a dual language school, teachers have been thoughtful of how they are utilizing the Reading Streets literacy program, along with Spanish language resources to support ELLs, such as Imagine Learning and Estrellita. The school also uses Foundations for phonics support during English instructional periods. Additionally, teacher-created writing units of study embed social studies content and outline what students will do and what specific skills and tasks they will engage in. For instance, the kindergarten theme on “Families”, includes students’ exposure to read alouds related to the concept of “family”, followed by a writing task, such as describing and illustrating their favorite memory about their family. The school also uses the Envisions math program and teacher-created math Exemplars to ensure students are provided opportunities to problem-solve, explain and demonstrate their thinking of math concepts within written tasks.
- Across the grades and content areas, curriculum maps reflect the planning within themes with essential questions, daily learning targets, with strategies for ELLs, students with disabilities, academic intervention service center suggestions, as well as enrichment opportunities to ensure all students are provided an opportunity to engage with content and tasks that supports their learning needs. All teachers utilize the school’s lesson plan template, which includes a focus on academic vocabulary to support the language development of ELLs, other various English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies and scaffolds. The plans also differentiated instruction strategies, including small group instruction, support strategies and enrichment opportunities for students who are prepared to move beyond the grade-level task.
- Within the last year, grade teams have engaged in various revisions to the curricula and academic tasks based on their analysis of student work and data. For example, kindergarten teachers modified a math exemplar from last year where the task provided more scaffolds to support students’ understanding and abilities to complete the task. This year, teachers have increased their expectations and released some of the scaffolds of support within the task by eliminating one of the two boxes for solving, illustrating and writing a number sentence to demonstrate their understanding of a math story problem. Additionally, revisions to the kindergarten literacy unit 4 from last year reflect more detailed and skill-based essential questions this year, with the inclusion of weekly questions that align to the unit’s exploration theme.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teachers are using a variety of assessments and rubrics that are aligned to school's curricula, however, across classrooms, checks for understanding and students' self-assessments are inconsistent.

Impact

Uneven assessment practices have led to inexplicit feedback during goal setting sessions that hinder students' understanding of their strengths and next steps for learning, as well as instructional adjustments that do not always support students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Throughout the school, teachers are using Fountas and Pinnell running records, Sistema to determine Spanish reading levels, formative unit assessments in reading and math, as well as teacher-created writing and math Exemplar tasks, with standards-aligned rubrics to determine where students are. This year, teachers have begun to use the school-created Comprehension, Application, Fluency and Expansion (CAFE) tool to share with students where they are and to set goals based on their skill sets, as well as from outcomes from their writing and math tasks. However, feedback to students during conferring has not fully been internalized, as many were unclear of where they were in reading and math or what the goals set with their teachers really meant about their learning. Some were able to articulate their reading levels, but were not able to explain why they were given a specific goal. Additionally, teacher feedback provided on some work products was not always aligned to the rubric or speak to the priorities of the rubric in setting student goals.
- During visits to classrooms, some teachers were observed checking for understanding by asking questions to determine what students understood during closing circle discussions, while some used checklists as they conferred with students as they circulated the classroom. However, this was an inconsistent practice across visited classrooms. For example, in one classroom, the teacher circulated to each small group to provide individual students specific feedback on their work and tracked their learning and understanding on her checklist. In another classroom, the teacher engaged students in a circle time closing lesson discussion without memorializing in writing their understanding or misconceptions from the lesson.
- While students have begun to self-assess using student-friendly rubrics and checklist, along with the CAFE board that outlines the skills and students' names and where they are in terms of mastery, not all teachers have initiated their small groups based on this data. For instance, one teacher shared how her student groups were formulated based on the previous day's lesson and how her students were assigned tasks, based on that formative information. Conversely, in another classroom, students who had completed the assigned writing task, were seated with their peers, to provide assistance with the content, skills or language within the lesson assignment. These students were not reassigned to another group to engage in more challenging work related to the lesson content.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to staff through ongoing feedback and professional learning opportunities. The school provides regular feedback to families in order to support and position all learners on a path towards college and career readiness.

Impact

Regular feedback and support has provided teachers with clear guidelines for teaching and learning outcomes. Consistent communication to families around student progress has equipped them with knowledge and awareness to support their children’s learning.

Supporting Evidence

- During the summer months, teachers are provided an opportunity to participate in professional learning sessions offered by the school and to begin their curriculum and assessment planning for the new, incoming grades for the upcoming school year. Additionally, all staff is provided with a staff handbook that outlines the expectations around teaching and learning, the use of the school-wide lesson template, as well as suggestions to promote discussions within classrooms using the “five powerful question” protocol. Teachers across the school are also encouraged to become dually-certified for ESL licensing or receive training to apply for a bilingual extension, in order to better serve and support their ELL population.
- Administrators provide opportunities for teachers to be reflective of their practice by engaging in a school-created post-observation process. Teachers analyze and annotate scripts from their own lesson observations and use the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric to rate themselves based on their self-analysis. School leaders and teachers collectively decide on an overall rating and develop action plans and professional learning opportunities to address teachers’ needs. Across the school, teachers are also participating in inter-visitations to observe colleagues’ best practices and have begun to videotape themselves and share their practices within professional learning teams.
- Parents expressed great satisfaction with the school’s communication around their children’s progress through the regular availability of teachers and staff, through the progress reports that are administered in between the school’s standards-based report cards and teachers’ willingness to sit with them to explain where their children are and what they need to improve. In addition, parents feel the school has supported their own learning by offering workshops, parent orientations to explain the Common Core Learning Standards and providing on-site ESL classes that support their language development, as their children become proficient in both English and Spanish. Parents feel that as a result of the school’s ongoing support, they are moving towards being able to better assist their children with homework and things they may be struggling with, at home.