



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S.221 The North Hills School

Elementary School Q221

**57-40 Marathon Parkway
Queens
NY 11362**

Principal: Patricia Bullard

**Date of review: January 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Danielle Giunta**

The School Context

The North Hills School is an elementary school with 641 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 3% Black, 12% Hispanic, 19% White, and 66% Asian students. The student body includes 5% 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 2012 - 2013 was 96.4%.

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	Celebration	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	Focus	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:

1.2 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 was developed as a result of discussions at the team and school levels. Teaching practices, including questioning and scaffolds, provide multiple entry points, supports and extensions.

Impact

All learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school believes all children are capable of success when held to the same standards and provided multiple entry points so that students can access and engage with the curriculum. As a result, across all eight classrooms visited, teaching practices, including questioning, scaffolds and multiple entry points, reflect this core belief and are aligned to the Common Core State Standards and instructional shifts.
- In one kindergarten class, the teacher used an exemplar writing piece for a small moment story to invite students into adding details to their pictures and words. The teacher then asked students to coach her into making her story stronger. Students offered feelings, dialogue and details to pictures. Students were then prompted to return to writing partnerships to coach into each other's writing pieces.
- In a 5th grade class, students were working on multi-step word problems using properties to add fractions with unlike denominators. Students were divided into four ability-based groups. One group, primarily comprised of English language learners, was provided word problems that incorporated color-coding to help students access the important information. The high-achiever group was provided questions that contained distracting information, prompting students to determine important information needed to solve the problem.
- In another class, students were engaged in differentiated tasks connected to the school's "Book of the Month." Students were asked to use the book entitled *Martin's Big Words*, by Doreen Rappaport, to develop an opinion about Martin Luther King, Jr. using the text and a thinking map to extract evidence and justify their opinion. One larger group of emerging learners sat in circle, holding both a text version and the actual picture book to support their conversation and thinking. Another group of high-achieving students were given a copy of the text and the option of three websites to choose from, facilitating students to look across multiple sources of information to form and support their opinion.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms teachers create assessments, rubrics and checklists aligned to the school's curricula. Assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Assessment practices and ongoing checks for understanding allow teachers to make effective adjustments to meet all students' needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Students interviewed shared work across a variety of subject areas. Each piece was accompanied by a rubric or checklist as well as feedback from their teacher and peers. Students clearly articulated where they were on the rubric and specific steps to be taken to improve. Students described the different groups taking place in their classes based on different goals and that the groups are flexible.
- Students regularly work in groups and engage in self- and peer-assessment. Teachers launch units of student by engaging students in reviewing the rubric and highlighting expectations. As one student stated, "The rubric helps me organize; it tells me how to write and what the rules are. I always look at the top score so I know exactly what I need to do." As a result, students are able to reflect on their work, citing where they incorporated rubric criteria and feedback they received.
- Teachers and school leaders regularly collect and analyze student work and data on the class and grade level. However, school leaders and teachers have not yet developed a system which enables them to view student trends at the school level and set benchmarks towards the goals they have set.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across subject areas and grades. Curricula are refined using student work and data.

Impact

Across grades and subjects all students demonstrate their thinking, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school believes students learn best when they are held to grade level standards and provided multiple entry points. To that end, the school has developed a range of supports and extensions for all students including high-achievers, English language learners and students with disabilities. Examples include; color coding, implementation of thinking maps and use of parallel texts and exemplar texts. These tools are used to support and enhance learning opportunities. As a result, across the vast majority of classrooms, students are able to access the curricula, articulate the purpose of the task and the understood the varied and flexible groupings in the class.
- The use of thinking maps allows all students to demonstrate their thinking and it provides them a natural entry point for determining appropriate maps to align with the task as well as how much information can and should be captured in the maps. Leaders, teachers, students and parents are keenly aware that the maps serve as a first step in the thinking process and that all maps lead to a complex task such as writing a opinion or argument based essay, organizing for a research project or solving a problem.
- During the teacher team meeting observed, teachers identified a problem with the complexity of the mentor texts in ReadyGEN for some of the students in their classes. The grade level team worked closely with the English as a second language teacher to identify alternate and parallel texts that aligned with the core program's essential questions so that students are held to the same standard but can appropriately access the curriculum.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders, teacher teams and staff have established a culture of learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact

The school has successfully partnered with families to support student progress toward high expectations, resulting in students owning their educational experiences so they are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff employ various means of communication to families including: a website, newsletters, a school calendar, phone call system as well as student work with accompanying rubrics and feedback. Parents describe them as valuable and critical resources which allow them to be active participants in their child’s learning
- In the parent meeting, working parents and parents with limited opportunities for in-person contact with the school shared they felt the same level of engagement than parents who had ample opportunities for in-person contact with the school staff. Student work is sent home accompanied by the rubric and feedback provided by the teacher. Feedback includes not only what the child has done well and why, but next steps that include strategies to help attain the next level of achievement. Parents are required to sign and return the assignment; they indicated this has helped them not only to understand expectations but to understand where their child is and the next steps needed so that they can support them at home.
- In the student group, students stated when given a rubric they are encouraged to begin the unit rubric by reviewing the two highest levels as a starting place to access high expectations. Students were particularly excited to share and demonstrate how the feedback they receive helps them. One student appreciated that his teacher takes the time not only to write him a compliment about something he does well but also takes the time to include why.
- School leaders consider the implementation of thinking maps as a crucial learning tool supporting college and career readiness. Thinking maps allow students to not only organize their thinking but to make their thinking visible. Teachers having access to the thinking students are engaging in has allowed teachers to refine planning and teaching practices. For example, students often use a “tree map” to organize their thinking into categories in preparation for essay writing. Through the conferring process with students and at the teacher team level, teachers are able to assess how students are formulating ideas and organizing information. As a result, the school has noted an increase in student writing and discussion. Students are also including evidence to validate and justify their thinking.

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

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher practice and student work. Distributed leadership structures are embedded.

Impact

As a result of teacher collaboration and leadership, teachers have made shared improvements in their instructional practice and they play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Due to them regularly looking at student work, teachers are able to identify key elements of teacher practice and student work. For example, one teacher realized that her students were doing well at computation but not in explaining their work. This was evident in both classroom-based tasks as well as on the New York State math exam. The teacher reflected on her lesson plans and realized she was placing emphasis on formulas and procedures as opposed to embedding open-ended questions, incorporating thinking maps and requiring students to cite evidence of their thinking. Since the adoption of the Common Core Learning Standards and new aligned curricula, the teacher has shifted her practice and the impact is evidenced in student work. For example, across classrooms and subject areas, teachers have embedded opportunities for students to justify their thinking through writing, self-reflection and peer-feedback.
- Teacher leaders are identified to participate in network-facilitated professional development and new learning is shared at the team level. For example, the kindergarten through grade 2 math teachers attended a professional learning session dedicated to increasing “math talk”. As a first step, the math lead shared her new learning at the grade level team. The lead teacher began to incorporate strategies into her daily lessons. The math lead invited the principal in to observe a lesson and receive feedback. As a result of the observation, the principal asked the teacher to share the learning in a larger kindergarten through grade 2 setting during Monday’s professional learning period. As a result, the practice of increased “math talk” is now evident across kindergarten through grade 2 classrooms.
- Teacher teams regularly reflect on the level with which students are engaging in self-reflection and peer-editing. To foster this, as well as hold students accountable, the 5th grade teacher incorporated self-reflection and peer-editing into a checklist as part of the process for writing tasks and class projects. During the teacher team meeting, teachers noted the students were engaging in deep levels of reflection and peers were offering targeted feedback; however, it was not clear that students were incorporating reflection or feedback into their final revisions. As a result, the team is revising the checklist to incorporate a place for students to specifically highlight the revisions they made based on the feedback they received from their peers.