



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Active Learning Elementary School

Elementary School Q244

**137-20 Franklin Avenue
Flushing
NY 11355**

Principal: Mr. Robert Groff

**Date of review: February 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

The School Context

The Active Learning Elementary School is an early childhood school with 441 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 0% Black, 8% Hispanic, 4% White, and 86% Asian students. The student body includes 50% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 97.0%.

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 | Focus | 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 | 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 | 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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School Leaders and faculty engage in a rigorous process of curriculum development aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and strategically integrate instructional shifts.

Impact

Engaging curricula and tasks promote rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills across a majority of classrooms. Purposeful decisions to align curricula result in coherence across subjects that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- An examination of unit plans indicate that they closely meet the needs of individual students, using rigorous content, critical thinking and problem solving skills along with an English as a Second Language (ESL) component that is embedded into the plans so that English language learners can demonstrate their thinking.
- Teacher Teams observed stated that consultants from Thinking Maps and Math in the City helped them to create Common Core aligned plans that contain rubrics, conference notes, templates and student reflection pieces. Rigorous guiding questions, student rubrics and culminating tasks with daily lesson objectives outlining the flow of a given unit ensure coherence to the Danielson Framework, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and the English as a Second Language grammar continuum, as evident during classroom visits.
- Upon reading the grade level curriculum units in science and social studies, the scope and sequence are aligned to match the texts of what students are reading in English Language Arts with a focus on using analogous maps to solidify the coherence of what is taught and how it is used across classrooms. The math curriculum, *Math in the City*, uses sets of investigations that vertically occur in each grade. There is also *Language Through Music*, *Language Through Movement*, all taught by certified ESL teachers to support ELLs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the majority of classrooms, teaching practices reflect a coherent set of beliefs informed by the Danielson Framework that effective instruction yields high quality student work. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions into the curricula for all students.

Impact

All learners across classrooms are engaged in challenging tasks that enable them to demonstrate higher order thinking in their student work.

Supporting Evidence

- At least 86% of all students are reading at or above grade level as measured by Diagnostic Reading Assessment 2. Students in grades K-3 demonstrate competency in literacy by completing tasks focusing on both fiction and non-fiction reading, writing, speaking and listening assignments aligned with the CCLS in the units of study as shown through interim assessment data. The school is far above both District and Citywide data. In reviewing student work it is evident that all learners are producing high quality products that reflect the school's State test scores and the ranking of being in the top 20 schools in NYC. The school continues to strive for this success, and continues to build upon teaching strategies to deepen students understanding, and make connections to the real world.
- In the majority of classrooms visited students are engaged in rigorous tasks that enable all learners to produce meaningful work products. In a first grade science class, the teacher conferred with different groups to challenge their thinking. The students were working on gathering evidence about "What I Know About Liquids" by pouring colored water into different shaped containers and writing answers to specific questions using 'scientific' vocabulary, such as vial and transparent. The school is striving to have more interactive classroom experiences in all subjects and across all grades.
- In all classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions by responding to both teacher and student-generated questions. Students not only answered questions, but asked questions and extended their own thinking and that of their peers by providing examples from text or discussions to support their contributions. In some classes, teachers asked open-ended questions to push students' thinking, giving students an opportunity to deepen their thinking by questioning each other during think/pair/share, or building on comments made by peers in group or whole class discussions. Teachers are working to continue engaging students with higher levels of Depth of Knowledge questioning levels
- Students groupings, of the classes observed, were flexible and multiple entry points were provided, depending on need, to challenge all learners, including ELLs. In a math class, students were asked to do multi-step problems and share out explanations using reason and evidence. Students in groups received different worksheets with the same problems, but with more or less scaffolding. English language learners, newer to class, were given a worksheet that had pictorial support. 'Thumbs up/thumbs down' were used to reach consensus on the outcome. Exit slips were handed to the teacher for checking on understanding. Across a majority of classrooms, teachers used exit slips, extended time, visuals, leveled texts and a variety of graphic organizes that include T-Charts and KWL. A review of student portfolios and student work products revealed consistent high quality work.

Additional Findings

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| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, assessment practices are well aligned with the school's curricula, offer clear portrait of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, and are used to track progress.

Impact

A majority of teachers use systems to monitor progress through data analysis, assessments, both formative and summative, which are used regularly, provide meaningful feedback to students and to guide adjustments in lessons and units so that all students demonstrate mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams create coherent unit plans and lesson plans with embedded assessments to meet the needs of students and address individual student needs. For example, teachers are using a constructed response rubric utilizing the RACE (Restate the prompt, Answer the prompt, Cite the evidence, Elaborate and Explain with details) to provide feedback on student work. Teachers use data-driven web-based assessments, track student progress and analyze results. Teachers in all grades track progress through profile sheets for writing.
- The school uses 'Check-it-Dots, a self-editing system as well as assessments from Early Childhood Learning Assessment System and the Diagnostic Reading Assessment, and teacher-developed rubrics to inform students of next steps and of their progress. For example, the third grade teachers analyzed the English Language Arts State exam to determine what their students need to know and they then crafted a response to the standards-based writing task to understand the extent of student learning. Teachers then worked to create scaffolds, such as graphic organizers and organizational prompts to better support struggling learners and the ELL population.
- The school uses its own 'in-house' baseline assessment, in addition to NYS English as a Second Language Achievement Test data and information is shared on Goggle docs. Central to this information is how well students are able to read, write, speak and listen for information. This platform facilitates teacher knowledge on State student proficiency.
- Teachers use Smart boards and laptops to create assessments to track student progress and analyze results. The principal indicated that in each unit of study, students use rubrics to craft a response to the standards-based writing task. Teachers examine results, provide feedback, and use profile sheets as a system of organizing students' written responses, to understand the extent of learning. Differentiation practices address the needs of all students in response to tracking progress. Based on classroom observations, small groups of students are provided with strategy-focused mini-lessons to render more student support and substantial opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the content.
- This year's instructional focus on refinement of assessment and feedback systems to ensure that students and families have a clear understanding of what students are doing well and what they need to work as next steps. For example, one student in the 3rd grade stated that "I know when I am moving too fast and need to relax and ask myself some questions about what I am reading. I always have a checklist to review to make sure that I have completed the assignment. If I finish early I help other students and looking at their work I learn more about my work...."

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| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

A culture for learning is established that communicates and embeds high expectations shared by staff, families and students.

Impact

All members of the school community clearly articulate that TALES expectations are high and are supported by a culture of mutual accountability for teaching and learning that permeates the environment at the school. The school offers ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance supports that prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are guided and supervised by school leaders with extensive teaching experiences who provide clear expectations for pedagogical and professional practice via verbal and written communication, team meetings and regular meetings with the principal. There is a culture of mutual trust and accountability throughout the school that is evident throughout the hallways, classrooms and offices. The goals set forth by the principal are for deliberate and consistent expectations that strengthen and enhance the vision of the school.
- Teachers receive ongoing professional development and actionable feedback on the Danielson Framework competencies in their classes as well as Release Learning, where students are given more responsibilities for their own learning. When asked, teachers described the high expectations for their pedagogy and the support to students for ownership of learning at the teacher interview meeting. Teachers articulate the expectations as one of releasing the learning to students through high level questioning, discussions and taking steps to share thinking and inquiry with students and among teachers alike.
- Parents interviewed stated that they appreciate the commitment of the school to their children and appreciate the consistent and constant communication of their child's progress via email, phone calls and in-person meetings. The Parent Coordinator facilitates parent/family workshops provided by the faculty on the Common Core Learning Standards, on cooking with vegetables (since the school is vegetarian), and workshops that include instructional tips and *Make and Take* lessons where parents create games/activities to support literacy and math at home. Teachers provide reading and writing assistance to parents during workshops and at conferences. There is an unwavering belief that students will achieve high levels of success as articulated by all stakeholders. Families share this belief and are apprised of student progress on a consistent basis.
- Guidance support is provided for physical, social and emotional development as well as academics if needed. On-going feedback to families, both verbal, through email and conferencing exists to encourage all students, including the English language learners, to build successful outcomes for school and for life.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Leadership structures provide a means for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence, improved pedagogy, student work and progress. Shared leadership structures build capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams across grades are working together to plan lessons aligned to the Common Core that generate text dependent questions to reinforce students habits of referring to text for evidence to support their responses and to promote critical thinking skills as evidenced in lesson plans with common alignment and lessons observed showing practices in rubrics, analysis of student results at the end of tasks.
- Teacher teams participate in common planning, grade level planning, inquiry and professional development to facilitate increased expertise in pedagogy around the CCLS and Danielson Framework as well as Webb's DOK. Teachers stated that they often meet during lunch periods, preps and other times outside of school hours to ensure that they are well prepared for student success. Cross-grade meetings also serve to make vertical alignment clear for next steps. For example, the second and third grade teachers meet on a regular basis to compare student notes, discuss data, creating an awareness of where students are challenged and where they need to go to succeed in the next grade. Teachers stated that they now have more interest in working across grades to better meet the needs of students.
- Teacher teams help facilitate inter-visitations in order to gain insight into their own strengths and challenges. Teachers then share information in a non-evaluative manner and use Goggle Drive documents to schedule and track inter-visitation feedback. Using protocols to review student work the team has built a tool kit of strategies to help students improve, especially the English Language Learners. For instance, teachers use large key rings with vocabulary words attached for students to take home and study.
- Data sources are used at meetings and during an observed meeting, a team was comparing the work of two students to access learning outcomes. After results were recorded, the teachers worked with staff developers and administration to provide students with extra time using the Foundations Phonics Program to improve their English language both in writing and in verbal skills. According to meeting agendas reviewed, there exists a embedded practice of reviewing student work pieces for to support student success and needs. This is evident in the ESL/Literacy teacher that pushes into each class during reading for co-teaching, guided reading and small group student support. Lesson plans often model both academic language (vocabulary) and content area vocabulary. There is extensive work on listening and language standards to encourage conversation, social and academic language development.