



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**New York City Academy for Discovery**

**Elementary School Q306**

**95-16 89<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11421**

**Principal: Cheryl-Ann Leone**

**Date of review: February 6, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Shirley Wheeler-Massey**

## The School Context

P.S. 306 is an Elementary school with 477 students from prekindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 6% Black, 67% Hispanic, 5% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.8%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Within vertical and grade teams, teacher leaders facilitate discussions and the analysis of student work, assessment data and teacher practice.

### Impact

The ongoing analysis of student work and data has led to teachers developing a variety of teaching strategies to support student learning and resulted in improved student writing and achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- During an observed meeting, grade 5 teachers were analyzing the writing of students across the grade within the bottom-third, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. Teachers on the grade, including the English as a Second Language Teacher (ESL) and Individual Education Plan (IEP) teacher, utilized the Collaborative Analysis Protocol to discuss their noticings within the identified students' work and to determine next steps for teaching. Teachers shared how some of their students still struggled with the appropriate use of transitional words and discussed several strategies they would employ, such as modifying graphic organizers or using sentence starters, to support students' diverse needs. Teachers expressed that having the support of the ESL and IEP teacher at their meetings has helped increase their teaching toolkits and have begun to utilize strategies, such as the use of videos to spark enthusiasm and interest from their students.
- Throughout both teacher team meetings, teachers focused on the instructional goals of connecting learning to experience and improving student writing. As a school, they identified writing organization to be an issue across grades and developed scaffolds, writing supports and prompts to assist students with their writing skills. Teachers discussed how they have noticed an improvement with overall student writing, based on beginning of the year writing assessments to recently administered assessments. For example, non-speaking English students who were having difficulty forming sentences and organizing their ideas on earlier assessments were able to demonstrate their understanding of the task on mid-year assessments. Teachers shared that they believe the improvements are a direct result of the strategies they share and develop at their meetings and their continuous focus on improving students' writing skills.
- Across the school, teachers take on various leadership roles within the vertical team and on grade teams to facilitate discussions between the two, to ensure instructional coherence and ongoing communication about what is happening across the school. Grade leaders represent their respective grades on the school's vertical team who collaborates with administrators to make curricula and instructional decisions. These collaborations resulted in the school determining their instructional foci for the year and the creation of strategies, and professional learning opportunities that would support teachers with effectively addressing the students' needs throughout the school.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Teachers utilize a variety of assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned to the school's curricula. However, teachers' assessment practices did not reflect the use of varied checks for understanding and student-self-assessments.

### Impact

While teachers utilize assessments to glean evidence to monitor student understanding and provide feedback to improve student learning, checks for understanding and self-reflective practices do not always provide students with a clear portrait of where they are, with missed opportunities to make effective instructional adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across grades, teachers utilize a myriad of assessments such as Fountas and Pinnell running records, DIBELS for English Language Arts and math, New York City MOSL for writing and math, unit assessments from Go Math, Ready Gen writing tasks, along with teacher-created assessments across content areas. Additionally, teachers often use task-specific and standards-aligned rubrics, to determine where students are and to provide feedback that explains strengths and next steps. Some students have begun to utilize self and peer assessment checklists with their writing to regulate their work, prior to teacher input and feedback. However, teacher feedback and student reflections were not always meaningful and directly aligned to the rubric for the tasks. In discussions with students, they were not always clear on why they were in specific groups or working on differentiated tasks during lessons, while others were unable to articulate their next learning steps within a content area.
- During visits to classrooms, most teachers circulated the classroom to small groups and asked questions, such as "How do you know?", "Explain it in your own words," to determine student understanding. However, of the seven classrooms visited, only two teachers strategically made on the spot adjustments to student grouping and support or utilized a tool to track student understanding to inform their next instructional steps to improve student learning. For example, after the mini-lesson, one teacher recognized that a group of students were struggling with the math concept and pulled them for additional support at the board, while another teacher who made an adjustment to the lesson based on some students' misconceptions, missed the opportunity to revise the task for high-achievers who were able to fully articulate their understanding of the activity and the solution to the experiment problem.
- Throughout the building, student work products displayed on bulletin boards and within student portfolios contained teacher feedback and opportunities for students to utilize checklist to reflect on their work. Feedback to students included a strength and next step for improvement; however, the feedback was not always rich and meaningful and did not always require students to think deeply about their work or explain how they can take their work beyond the current level. Additionally, students' responses to written feedback on student work did not always reflect a clear understanding of what they needed to do improve. For example, a teacher noted that a student needed to include more sensory details within their writing, and the students' self-assessment stated that they would work on capitalization and punctuation.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

School leaders and staff effectively align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Grade and vertical teams utilize student work and data to plan and revise curricula and academic tasks.

### Impact

Collaborative curricular decisions have led to coherence across grades and the promotion of college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, teachers utilize the Ready Gen literacy program, Language Power, Reading A-Z for guided reading, Imagine Learning to support ELLs and Raz Kids to support struggling learners. Additionally, the school uses the Go Math program and core scope and sequence for science and social studies to structure learning tasks that embed the instructional shifts, such as close reading, engaging with informational and complex text, citing evidence to support thinking and the creation and analysis of math problems.
- Teacher's lesson and unit plans are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and reflect the planning of the school's instructional focus of connecting learning to experience, the workshop model with a mini-lesson-I-Do, guided practice-We Do, and independent or group work-You Do. Additionally, most plans include the planning for differentiated tasks or group activities for ELLs and students with disabilities, with some reflecting scaffolds of support for struggling learners, such as math manipulatives, graphic organizer choice or on-line resources or software programs and some with extension tasks for high achievers.
- Current curriculum maps reflect adjustments made by grade and vertical teams within reading, writing and math programs. Across grades, teachers modified plans to address the gaps reflected in the Ready Gen program and based on the needs of their students. For example, based on a review of what worked last year and student data, teachers modified units to include additional time for guided reading, lengthened time of units and lessons to take a deeper dive into the content, as well as adjusted performance tasks to include opportunities for differentiation. Furthermore, based on fifth grade projects from last year, teachers collaboratively decided to tailor the performance tasks to include sentence starters and prompts within brochures, as well as additional research information and resources to ensure ELLs and students with disabilities are able to successfully engage and complete the tasks.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Teaching practices and strategies are aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the school's instructional focus and provide supports and access into lessons for all learners.

### Impact

The result of a common understanding of student learning has led to all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities to demonstrate their thinking within their work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers determined that they would re-focus on the school's mission and values of discovery-based and experiential learning through one of their instructional foci of "connecting learning to experience". During classroom visits, this focus was evident, as most students engaged in a variety of differentiated tasks that were supported by scaffolds, such as teacher-created visual aids, graphic organizers and sentence starters, along with real-world connections. For example, in a fifth grade classroom, students were grouped according to their ability levels and worked on differentiated math tasks that included solving, creating and analyzing math fraction models and problems that connected to the real world such as baking, building a tree house and planting trees. Students utilized math fraction manipulatives as they worked in small groups or partnerships to discuss and share their work and were given opportunity to explain their strategies or work within the whole group.
- Through the revised instructional blocks, teachers are using the workshop model to provide mini-lessons, opportunities for small group or guided reading instruction, followed by an assessment of learning within a whole group structure. In visits to classrooms, students were consistently observed engaging in small group work and demonstrating their thinking or learning using close reading strategies and citing text evidence to support their written and verbal responses. During one class visit, fourth grade students, including students with disabilities, were engaged in a close reading activity, with the support of their teachers, where they compared and contrasted concepts presented within an informational text about Earthquakes. Students were also provided an opportunity to use a compare and contrast graphic organizer of their choice to take notes of the details shared about the two Earthquake scales and work independently to revisit the text and include additional informational captured, as well as from other Earthquake resources.
- With a focus on Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* components 3b-Questioning and Discussion and 3c-Engaging Students in Learning, teachers have been provided with professional learning and training focused on Depth of Knowledge and experiential learning, to ensure students are exposed to higher-order thinking activities and engaging learning experiences. Across classrooms, teacher questioning pushed students' thinking and most often required them to explain "why". For example, "How can I use this information to create a model?" "Explain why I should stop at this point in the problem?" Students utilized discussions and information shared within whole and small groups, to complete tasks that met their specific learning needs.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to staff through ongoing feedback and professional learning opportunities. Through collaborative structures, school staff has established a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to all students.

### **Impact**

Ongoing communication and support, has increased teacher's understanding and awareness of school leaders' expectations around teaching and learning. Consistent feedback and guidance from staff have armed students with tools to be prepared for the next level of learning.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers are apprised of all school information through the School's Share Site, which includes teaching resources, as well as teacher team meeting agendas and minutes. In addition, teachers are provided with ongoing professional learning opportunities that are designed specifically with their needs in mind. After each observation, teachers are required to complete an observation reflection sheet in which they use the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* rubric to rate themselves on specific components and collaboratively develop next steps for improved practice with an administrator during the post-observation conference.
- The professional learning plan which is aligned to Danielson's Framework for Teaching and the school goals, is designed in collaboration with the vertical team and facilitated by some teachers and instructional coaches, based on the findings from informal and formal observations. Feedback to teachers suggest next steps and resources, such as: work with instructional coaches; reading articles like "4 (Secret Keys to Student Engagement," and reviewing Teacher Improvement Plans to determine success within focus areas. These support teachers' efforts to improve their practice." Teachers expressed that feedback from administrators after observations and completing the reflection forms have allowed them to be reflective and truly hone in on specific areas that they may need further support in.
- Teachers across the school consistently provide students with feedback on their work and offer support through small group and remediation to ensure they meet those goals or expectations as well as sharing information with students that inform them of what they need to be prepared for middle school and beyond. Students expressed feeling more than prepared for middle and high school, since they are always working on challenging tasks that require them to "think hard" and apply and connect their learning to "something real-life."