



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Pioneer Academy

Elementary School Q307

**40-20 100th Street
Queens
NY 11368**

Principal: Cecilia Jackson

Date of review: December 9, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart

The School Context

Pioneer Academy is an elementary school with 983 students from grade Kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 93% Hispanic, 1% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 35% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.9%.

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	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	Proficient
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Many teachers assume leadership roles and all are regularly engaged in inquiry-based collaborations to promote implementation of the standards and improve key elements of their practice.

Impact

Teachers have an integral part in the decisions that lead to instructional coherence and strong focus on improved student achievement.

Evidence

- Teachers have multiple times each week for professional development (PD) and teacher team meetings, both by grade and by department, as well as daily common planning time. At one teacher team meeting, the teachers outlined strategies they could use to move individual students who were in tier II to tier I. This focus on improving outcomes for tiers of students was also seen in the agendas from other team meetings. Many teachers voluntarily meet before school and during lunch times to discuss their lessons and the progress of their students. According to the School Survey, 93% of teachers agree that the school leader provides time for collaboration between teachers.
- Coaches and grade leaders meet weekly to share common trends and needs that have emerged from their teacher team meetings to inform future PD and reinforce the instructional coherence across grades and content areas. There is also a teacher-led PD committee that helps to plan for weekly PD sessions. This committee determined that teachers wanted to work on assessment practices which became one of the school-wide instructional foci for the year.
- Teachers engage in regular intervisitations to each other's classrooms, sometimes as part of the lesson study team, and sometimes voluntarily as a result of discussions between themselves. After the intervisitations there is a debriefing session with the coach that includes analyzing what was seen and heard, planning the next steps for improvement, and following up with support and subsequent observation.
- Teachers assume grade leader and data liaison roles and state that they have an active role in decision making. For example, because the school is departmentalized, the school changed the time frame for parent-teacher conferences, at the suggestion of the teachers, to allow for them to meet with more parents. Teachers lead after school activities that they believe will help improve student achievement and engagement, such as starting a drama club.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

There is a common belief that students learn best from each other and the teacher is the facilitator of learning through curricula that is aligned to standards.

Impact

Students are actively engaged in tasks and produce work that requires high levels of thinking although they do not yet exhibit full ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across grades and content areas regularly have students turn and talk so they can share and develop their thinking, although some teachers missed opportunities for such discussions. Pairs of students in a grade 2 class discussed where and when thunderstorms take place in preparation for reading a book about them. In another class, students assigned a specific role within a group rotated from station to station to complete measuring tasks. Students were overheard discussing their results and challenging each other to explain why they were rounding the measurement up or down.
- Co-teachers plan and deliver instruction jointly. In some classrooms, the co-teachers worked with different groups of students at different stations, or provide differentiated instruction with specific groups of students. Two teachers who have a class in common share their daily conference notes by email.
- Student discussion during lessons demonstrated consistent levels of engagement. Written work on bulletin boards and in work folders showed that students are regularly engaged in rigorous tasks that require them to explain their work and to take a position and defend it. For example, a grade 2 student explained that he used a meter stick (instead of a ruler) to measure the rug because a meter stick measures large things. Observation reports, based on the Danielson Framework, include strategies for improving student engagement,
- The majority of the questions asked during lessons were of Depth of Knowledge level 1 and 2. For example, in a kindergarten class the students were told that the word “is” is a sight word and were asked where in the room it could be seen. It was displayed on the word wall and the students were asked trace the word in the air. In another class the students were asked, “What does a fluent reader sound like?” Teachers usually allowed time for students to formulate an answer, but occasionally the principal noted that she would like to see longer wait time before the teacher provided additional prompts. Students occasionally initiate a new line of questioning, but this is not a wide-spread practice.
- Students know and practice classroom routines with ease. Print-rich classrooms have abundant books in leveled or genre-identified bins. Materials and supplies are readily available and activity centers are organized for play and study. In the gymnasium, students helped to organize teams and set up for the competition. Many teachers use Smartboards to deliver engaging instruction. For example, kindergarten students jumped, bounced, wriggled or were still depending on the music and prompts that were displayed with a countdown timer on the Smartboard.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The principal and teachers ensure curricula are aligned to the learning standards and incorporate the instructional shifts with rigorous tasks requiring higher order thinking.

Impact

Teachers are building coherence of instruction across grades and subjects, particularly in writing, so that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities are challenged to become college and career ready.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use the Tri-State rubrics in English language arts (ELA) and math to determine the alignment of curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). They make choices about which materials to use and which to adapt or modify. Teachers create interdisciplinary units of study to align with content standards in social studies and science.
- Teachers use and adapt curriculum resources from Expeditionary Learning, EngageNY, National Science Foundation and Core Knowledge. They modify unit and lesson plans to incorporate writing skills and build coherence across grades and content areas in writing instruction. Grade specific writing process checklists were observed in classrooms. Teachers modified the Expeditionary Learning units of study to emphasize essay writing skills and to incorporate more writing from sources in order to ensure their students were prepared for middle school and eventually for college or career.
- Teachers voluntarily create lesson plans using a common template that includes essential questions, references the standards addressed, highlights academic vocabulary development and anticipated misconceptions, and emphasizes real life applications in a section on “What is the 40-year effect?” In a lesson on adding and subtracting units of time, the long-term effect was about the importance of being able to measure time accurately. A lesson for English language learners addressed the need for both vocabulary development and conventions of spoken English. Students in this class were continually asked to use complete sentences in their partner discussions and when they shared with the whole class.
- Unit plans outline the learning objectives, what students should know, understand and be able to do and include suggested assessment items as well as differentiation strategies for tier 1, 2, and 3 students. Some lesson plans explicitly identified which students were in each tier. Other lesson plans specify the activities intended to engage students with a variety of learning styles, such as using a BrainPop video on rounding numbers in an integrated co-teaching class to appeal to visual and auditory learners.
- Teachers incorporate informational as well as literary texts into their unit plans. A grade 3 ELA unit on becoming a close reader includes the autobiographical *Thank you, Mr. Falker*, as well as *The Boy Who Loved Words*. Math teachers encourage deep understanding by focusing on developing tasks that encourage students to use more than one strategy or representation to explain the mathematics involved in a particular task and by requiring students to explain or defend their answer.

Findings

Teachers create or modify existing assessments and rubrics to accompany standards-based units of study and utilize various methods to track student learning and understanding.

Impact

Feedback to students is actionable, and teachers adjust instruction to meet the needs of their students.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics in use throughout the school are grade appropriate and specific to the unit of study. For example, a grade 2 rubric for math illustrates a Level 4 as a complex jigsaw puzzle that has been correctly assembled and a Level 2 as one that has been partially assembled. Students report they use the rubrics and examinations of work products confirmed they are used widely across grades and content areas. One student stated that the rubric “tells me the steps I need to use to do (a task) well.” Feedback to students is specific and actionable. For example, a student reflected on his performance and acknowledged he spelled some words wrong. The teacher responded by agreeing that some words were not spelled correctly and reminded him that he can get help from classroom resources such as the charts on the wall, a peer, the teacher or his notebook.
- Teachers check for understanding during lessons in a variety of ways, such as asking students to indicate agreement with a statement using the thumbs up or thumbs down signal and then following up to ask students to explain their response and guiding the discussion until the whole class agrees and understands why it is correct. In one classroom students move magnets on a board to track their daily improvement. Tasks often include assessments by the student as well as those by a peer and the teacher.
- Teachers analyze the outcomes of daily or end-of-unit assessments in order to tier students for the next activity or unit of study. For example, one teacher tracks the completion of tasks during a unit on writing and illustration and uses the results to regroup students who are at similar stages of completion. Teachers use a protocol when they look at student work in order to reveal trends and tier students. In one grade level team meeting, teachers were reviewing data to determine how to move students from one tier to the next. A pair of teachers was discussing instructional strategies to move students they shared who were on the cusp between two tiers.
- The school has developed an online data collection and sharing system, the Pioneer Academy data drive (PADD), to make assessment data and analysis easily available to teachers and administrators. Diagnostic and benchmark assessment results are scanned and sent to the drive. Teachers upload information about their students’ performance regularly so it is available to other teachers. In a school administered survey, 100% of the respondents indicated the PADD is useful to them and has helped them in planning and instruction. An analysis of usage of the drive indicates that, on a weekly basis, there are more than 80 active users. Teachers stated that the PADD helps them organize data about student performance in a way that makes it easier for them to identify and plan for the needs of their students.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

High expectations for professionalism and academic and personal achievement needed for college and career readiness are consistently communicated to students and staff.

Impact

There is a strong partnership between teachers and parents to be accountable for meeting high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Supervisors remind teachers to communicate and reinforce high expectations to students through the observation process. For example, one observation report suggests that the teacher should highlight specific elements of students' work by displaying those that demonstrate high performance. Teachers voluntarily participate in post-observation conferences with supervisors to debrief, plan for professional growth and discuss strategies for improving student outcomes.
- A weekly bulletin is sent to the staff with reminders about upcoming events and PD opportunities as well as reminders about reinforcing high expectations for professionalism and student achievement.
- Students are selected to be the Pioneer of the Month to celebrate individual accomplishments in attendance, punctuality, work habits and effort and respect for all. These students receive certificates and have their names and photographs displayed in the hall outside of their classroom.
- College and career development is fostered through the Cloud 9 World program which explores and celebrates positive character traits, such as perseverance and responsibility, each month. Students and their families receive a book every month which reinforces the home-school literacy connection and builds the partnership between parents and teachers in developing the habits of mind needed for success in college and career.
- Workshops are held for parents on understanding the expectations of the CCLS and to help them support the academic and social-emotional development of their children. For example, coaches led a workshop in November on strategies for success. Parents receive regular feedback on student progress through monthly progress reports and daily communication between parents and teachers is facilitated through each child's Pioneer Academy Agenda, which is also used to help students develop strong organizational and study habits.