



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Queens Explorers**

**Elementary School Q316**

**90-07 101st Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11416**

**Principal: Melissa Compson**

**Date of review: April 22, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Mary Barton**

## The School Context

Queens Explorers is an elementary school with 99 students from pre-kindergarten through kindergarten. The school population comprises 12% Black, 53% Hispanic, 17% White, and 11% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 is not available due to new school status.

## 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>Well Developed</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>Focus</b>               | <b>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</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>Celebration</b>         | <b>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |

## Area of Celebration

|                           |                              |                |                       |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>3.4 High Expectations</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

The principal consistently communicates high expectations to the entire staff and provides professional learning opportunities that support the implementation of best practices. School leaders and staff effectively communicate Common Core Learning Standard expectations to families, as well as college and career readiness pathways.

### Impact

High expectations are continuously communicated resulting in a collaborative learning culture and improved learning outcomes for adults and students throughout the school. The school successfully partners with and supports students and their families.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff through professional learning, guidance through informal and formal observations and data conferences with teachers to discuss assessment results. Teachers also set professional goals for themselves which are revisited three times yearly in conferences with the principal. Teachers also complete professional development logs and reflect on one thing that they learned and how they turnkey their learning to a colleague individually or on their grade team.
- A system of mutual accountability enables teachers to conduct inter-visitations and provide their peers with verbal and written feedback. When teachers visit each other's classes, they visit looking at a particular focus area connected to a competency in the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers complete a "colleague glows and grows" sheet in which they provide warm and cool feedback. Teachers are recognized with a certificate by the principal after focusing on that competency and incorporating feedback given during a given week.
- Resources such as parent newsletters, a parent handbook, the school website and an on line grading system keeps parents apprised of curricula expectations and their children's academic progress. Additionally, parents participate in literacy nights and parent academies on academics, and complete surveys after each session so that staff can make adjustments to future workshops. Parents are also involved in the school's service learning projects and several reading programs that allow them to work with their children at home on specific reading skills. Parents reported they could e-mail or meet their child's teacher to discuss questions about the curricula and their child's strengths and struggles. One parent said, "This school provides parents with lots of resources and my kindergarten child is talking about college and a career already."

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

### Findings

Teachers consistently provide scaffolds, strategic extensions, questioning and instructional supports that reflect higher-order thinking skills, across the vast majority of classrooms. Students have consistent opportunities to share their thinking and are able to speak about their work.

### Impact

Students produce meaningful work products and engage in discussions that reflect high levels of thinking, participation and ownership. However, English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities are not always provided with the high-quality supports that allow them to demonstrate higher-order thinking in their work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across the vast majority of classrooms visited, tasks promote higher-order thinking and teachers provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Teaching strategies also include high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula. In a kindergarten integrated collaborative teaching (ICT) class, one teacher read the book aloud, “*Kids Can Reuse*” as students were studying about the reusing of items. After the reading, students worked in groups to develop a yard sale sign to encourage people to come to their yard sale by stating why it is important to reuse. Specific students who needed support were provided with writing checklists on their table, while others had lists of key words they would need to complete the assignment. In addition, there were teacher assistance tables for students with questions. Students, who were ready, could also refer to writing prompts and could create another way to advertise their yard sale and share their work with their classmates.
- In a pre-kindergarten class, the teacher read the book “*A Sunflower’s Life*” aloud to the students and provided visuals from the book on the Promethean board for all learners, as well as asked open-ended questions. Students were exposed to vocabulary such as bud, pollen, root and shoot, which were posted in the classroom with picture cues. However, the teacher did not write down all the words or provide specific picture cues on the Promethean board as the vocabulary was being reviewed. This visual omission did not enable all students, particularly ELLs or students with disabilities to fully comprehend the text that was being shared. In addition, the teachers and paraprofessional guided students in planting sunflower seeds and discussed the different things needed for their pots, the caring for the plant, and made predictions around its growth using the language introduced. Students also had choices around learning, such as using an online science program and activity centers which included painting, and a water table, which were not directly connected to the lesson.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms visited, posters encourage student discussions and learners actively engage in partner and group discussions. Teachers encourage students to turn and talk, as well as engage in student-led discussions. In a kindergarten math class, students worked with the teacher on addition and subtraction word problems connected to their study of recycling and reusing. The teacher facilitated the discussion with students, who shared their thinking process in how they solved the problem with their peers and whole class. During the process, students referred to a checklist, which outlined the expectations for completing the task and by the end of the lesson, had ownership of their work by using the tool to monitor their learning and understanding. This level of ownership was evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

## Additional Findings

|                           |                       |                |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.1 Curriculum</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrates the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

Curricula decisions and adjustments, including the incorporation of the instructional shifts, result in coherence across grades and subjects, which enables all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, to access the curricula, and be cognitively engaged in tasks that promote college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaboratively design the school's inter-disciplinary curricula which blend research-based programs, such as Go Math and Engage New York, student needs, and the instructional goals of the school. The units are thematic in nature as they incorporate the standards of science and social studies into the reading and writing. Art and the use of technology are also vital components in the inter-disciplinary units. These curricular units engage students in creative and reflective inquiry and incorporate questioning and real-world connections across grades and subjects. For example, a kindergarten math unit on two and three dimensional shapes incorporates read alouds from books with connections to the unit focus, vocabulary around many shapes, as well as opportunities to use, draw and write about shapes and make real-world connections to their use. Modifications are noted on curricula units for students with disabilities and ELLs so that they complete the same performance task, but are met at their entry points.
- All curricula reflect learning objectives that stimulate student problem-solving and critical thinking for all learners. In one kindergarten unit, teachers planned for students to learn about the Earth and the importance of recycling, reusing and reducing and how this affects all living things. The unit plan outlined how students would be exposed to multiple read alouds and create a book to educate friends and families on ways to help care for the Earth. Additionally, students were given opportunities to plant using recycled milk cartons, create posters to display around the school, as well as create an iceberg and a polar bear, using recycled items. Furthermore, teachers planned a field trip to the Botanical Gardens so students could experience a virtual field trip to see polar bears in their habitat. Furthermore, a Skype session was organized for students with a scientist around environmental issues, along with a service learning project called "Think Twice, Don't Melt the Ice", which also enables them to come away with understanding around the importance of recycling and reusing. Students are given opportunities to learn content and make real-world connections.
- Every unit provides learning objectives and academic tasks that promote college and career readiness and emphasize academic vocabulary in literacy and across content areas. Curricula and units plans also provide include supports for ELLs and students with disabilities. Math units of study incorporate math language throughout units, as well as literacy connections through books that are pertinent to the topic being studied. Written problem-solving explanations are routinely required in the units of study. In a kindergarten unit on comparison, students were expected to sort M&Ms by color, graph their results and write at least 3-4 sentences comparing the colors using comparison vocabulary.

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>2.2 Assessment</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

Teachers on each grade level utilize common assessments, tasks and rubrics aligned to the school’s curricula to track student progress. Assessments practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessments.

### Impact

All students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are fully aware of their next steps through teacher, self and peer feedback. Teachers make ongoing adjustments to lessons and student grouping, which allow students to be met at their entry points and make progress.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams analyze student progress from data provided from common assessments. These assessments include a kindergarten checklist around readiness skills and a language interview conducted for each student at the start of the school year, Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments administered four times year or when students move levels, and Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) baseline and end of year assessments. Teachers also create one mid-year and end of unit tasks in math and English language arts (ELA), as well as, the Wilson program foundational skills assessments. Teachers adjust curricula and instruction based on student data. Examples of adjustments include teachers routinely forming flexible groups for guided reading, math and Response to Intervention (RTI) services, as well as providing scaffolds and supports for students with disabilities and ELLs.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms, students were able to speak to their “reteach and enrich” goals and next steps. Teachers consistently memorialize student progress and performance daily by keeping checklists and conference notes and adjust instruction and groups accordingly, which informs the “reteach and enrich” instruction. Students are engaged in both self and peer evaluation of work. Students use checklists in student-friendly language in math and in writing to assess their own tasks. Teachers ask students to circle their best work and to explain why it is the best. Teachers also ask students to “circle the one they need to make better” and then say why and fix it. Students shared that they also peer assess by looking at their partners’ work to help them make their work better. Students are often asked to share their partners work with the class or the teacher uses the document camera to project the student work on a Promethean board for students to provide each other feedback. Students were also able to speak to their current reading levels and where they need to go as a next step. Students also led parent- teacher conferences this year by telling what they are most proud of in school, what they can work on at home and their goals.
- Customized rubrics that are aligned with the school’s curricula are developed for student tasks and students receive feedback so that they know where they fall within the rubrics, using symbols for each level that are used commonly across the school. Teachers also use more sophisticated rubrics with criteria in writing rubrics, such as around illustrates, dictates, writing and handwriting, which are all linked to specific Common Core standards. This enables teachers to then have a picture of student mastery and track student progress. Student work and results are then shared with teacher teams, with trends being captured and adjustments made to lessons and units of study.

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

**Findings**

Teachers and school leaders engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Teachers’ voices are prominent in key decisions involving curricula and programs designed to improve pedagogy and student outcomes.

**Impact**

The collaboration of the teacher teams has resulted in ensuring and strengthening the coherence and alignment of instruction and curricula across all grades and subjects and increased student achievers for all learners. The teaching staff is empowered to participate in all decisions that affect student performance and progress.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher teams continually promote the implementation of and strengthening of the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts by evaluating and revising lesson and unit plans based on trends that result from looking at student work. Teams are organized horizontally by grade level and vertically. Teachers have common planning in their programs four times each week, in addition to the Monday and Tuesday after-school sessions. Teachers work collaboratively to create inter-disciplinary curricula, share and reflect on their practices, as they teach lessons and units. Teachers also discuss outcomes from visits to each other’s classrooms and reflect on observed practices and make revisions to lessons and units as well.
- The sharing of teacher team work and practices has made all the difference for teachers who came to the school from other school experiences. One teacher stated, “I have learned more this year than in any other.” I truly appreciate coming to work in a school that provides such opportunities for us to learn and grow in our practices.” The principal shared that she has complete trust in the work of the teachers, as they continue to create curricula and modify what has been taught. Teachers stated that they felt the same way about the principal and appreciate the opportunity to have a voice in all decision-making around instruction. For example, teachers began using Go Math as the major resources in math at the start of the school year. As the year progressed, they found that it did not meet all of the students’ needs and teachers also wanted to incorporate opportunities for more conceptual thinking. In voicing this concern to the principal, they worked together to add additional resources including Engage New York to the math units of study.
- The school has a continual cycle of looking at data of students and grouping students purposefully around goals for them with support during “reteach and enrich” time. At a kindergarten team meeting, teachers were looking at the results for students from a recent reading assessment and looked specifically at students who were still reading at level B and discussing why. Teachers drilled down to specific needs, such as students who need help with first sounds in words, others needing help with middle or end sounds and those experiencing challenges using pictures to make meaning. Teachers across the grade split the identified students into groups according to their specific deficit and students were then provided Response to Intervention (RTI) support in their deficit areas.