



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Waterside Children's Studio School

Elementary School Q317

**190 Beach 110 Street
Rockaway Park
NY 11694**

Principal: Dana Gerendasi

**Date of review: March 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Rajeev Bector**

The School Context

Waterside Children’s Studio School is an elementary school with 472 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 28% Black, 44% Hispanic, 21% White, 3% Asian students, and 4% other students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.9%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders hold high expectations of the entire staff and partner with families to support expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

By consistently communicating high expectations to staff and empowering parents to further their children's education, the school has created a culture for learning that supports the academic and social-emotional growth of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents state that they are fully informed regarding their children's learning strengths and weaknesses, as the teachers are extremely responsive and caring. The school has a variety of ways to communicate with parents, and to partner with them to support student progress. Examples include, the use of the school website to provide strategies to support their child's learning at home, a monthly newsletter, kindergarten reading program, partnerships with the Guggenheim museum and New York Ballet, and an emphasis on art, theatre, music, and dance to imbue students with the love of learning.
- The school creates multiple opportunities to partner with and engage families in learning. One of the school's goals in its Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) is that "During the 2014-2015 school year, on average, 85% of parents/guardians will attend at least three school events as documented with sign-in sheets." To achieve this goal, the school has designated the first Friday of every month as a "Family Friday." On these days, parents work collaboratively with their children and their children's teachers in classrooms on a specific theme that varies from month to month. The school also offers Winter and Spring Arts Festivals in December and May, and an Enrichment Showcase to celebrate student work through the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. In addition, every October parents meet with the principal for "Curriculum and Coffee" conversations. During "Family Workshops" parents learn how to help their child at home and in school. As a result, the 2013-2014 School Quality Snapshot indicates that, based on the NYC School Survey, 98% of parents "are satisfied with the education their child has received," and 97% of parents "feel that the school offers a wide variety of courses, extracurricular activities, and services."
- School leaders consistently communicate elevated expectations for all staff, and provide training to meet those expectations. The school's CEP indicates that school leadership expects at least 40% of teachers to demonstrate highly effective practice in questioning and discussion techniques, and to positively impact student achievement through professional development on developing content knowledge and enhancing pedagogical strategies. To accomplish this teachers are provided choices via a Google survey. They then work collaboratively with staff developers in study groups to determine how to meet their own learning needs. The school's Self-Evaluation Form indicates there are several structures to support professional learning, such as common planning time, Teachers' College staff development study groups and lab sites, Network Liaison Meetings, Monday Study Groups, Integrated Co-Teaching coaching through Goldmansour and Rutherford, and focused classroom inter-visitations.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and assessments aligned with the curricula. Teachers use the results of common assessments to adjust curricula and instruction, and their formative assessment practices reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

By monitoring student understanding and analyzing trends for groups of students, teachers are able to make adjustments to meet students' learning needs, to provide actionable feedback to students regarding student achievement, and to determine student progress toward goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Assessments and rubrics are aligned with the curricula, and an analysis of student work yields useful information about students. As a result, teachers are able to group students based on skill deficits. Across ICT classrooms observed, teachers made use of station teaching, and teachers and paraprofessionals worked together to differentiate instruction for students by strategically grouping them by comprehension skills and reading levels and providing targeted support.
- Teachers continuously monitor student understanding and provide feedback to students in a number of ways, through verbal and written feedback with clear expectations and next steps for improvement. However, in some classes, there was no evidence of student self-reflection or assessment, and students did not always use the rubrics without teacher prompting. As a result, individual teachers were unable to develop a nuanced understanding of the unique strengths and needs of each student to improve learning outcomes.
- Teachers' use of common assessments to determine student progress reveals adjustments that need to be made to their instructional practices. For instance, fourth grade math teachers analyzed the results of their baseline assessment and, based on this analysis, decided to incorporate scaffolds such as manipulatives and visual representations of concepts to support struggling learners.
- School leaders indicate that teachers use checklists, one-to-one conferencing, and verbal feedback to give curricula-aligned, actionable feedback to students. They also use teacher-created conferring toolkits for informational reading and writing, as well as assessment toolkits. The school differentiates the type and variety of feedback provided to students. For example, students in early grades are given more verbal than written feedback, and the school uses Imagine Learning for ESL and for its lowest third population.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core and content standards, integrate the instructional shifts, and emphasize rigorous habits. Curricula and academic tasks are planned using student work and data.

Impact

By aligning curricula to standards, refining curricula based on student outcomes, and ensuring that curricula emphasize higher-order skills across grades and subjects, the school promotes college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school ensures that a diversity of learners has access to the curricula and is cognitively engaged by examining student work and data, refining curricula and academic tasks, and formulating next steps for instruction. Teachers provided several examples. They stated that for each one of their Go Math chapters, they create a daily assessment checklist, checking off mastery for individual students for each assessed criteria. Based on the data analysis, they reteach concepts that students do not fully grasp. Similarly, teachers noticed that only a conversion chart was provided in the Go Math text, without any scaffolds or supports for students with disabilities. To meet the needs of different groups, teachers collaborated to create manipulatives so that students who struggle with conversion charts and other Go Math materials can access content in different ways.
- A review of the planning documents and data binders indicates that teachers use strategies such as Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions, graphic organizers, turn and talks, debate, modeling using mentor texts, and manipulatives to promote college and career readiness. Furthermore, supports provided for English language learners and students with disabilities include visual cues, translated goal cards, and paper choice (allowing students to choose the length of their response based on their level of readiness). However, supports and interventions for English language learners and students with disabilities are not always explicitly referenced in the curriculum maps. School leadership stated that these are emphasized in the data binders and lesson plans, since these documents are refined more frequently than the curriculum maps, and that since students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are grouped by skill level, not by disability, the groupings are constantly in flux based on student progress toward goals. Lack of these explicit supports in curricula impacts the progress made with English language learners. As the 2013-2014 New York State report card for grades 3-8 ELA assessments shows, “Limited English Proficient” students scoring at levels 3 and 4 decreased from 14% in 2013 to 8% in 2014.
- Curricula emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects. On the 2013-2014 New York City school survey report, 93% of teachers indicate that in literacy students often use evidence from text during discussion and use other students as a resource for understanding content and checking their thinking. This aligns with the school’s instructional focus: “students will demonstrate persistence in critical thinking and will be asked to frequently explain their thinking and readily share their ideas.” However, while teachers made attempts to encourage students to explain their thinking, high levels of student participation and ownership were not evident. As a result, not all students were able to demonstrate their understanding in small and whole group discussions.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Pedagogy is aligned to the curricula and reflects a coherent set of beliefs about student learning that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula, and the school makes a concerted effort to engage students in learning.

Impact

The alignment of pedagogy to curricula, and the use of scaffolding and questioning strategies, enables all learners to be engaged in appropriately challenging tasks. Scaffolding and modeling techniques used by teachers create the conditions for high levels of student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses the School Wide Enrichment model (SEM) to differentiate learning via a project-based curriculum, thereby allowing students choices for accessing content. Students choose their SEM clusters based on the offerings for that cycle. Some of the offerings include creating collages and sculptures using different kinds of paper, dramatizing stories, painting, creative writing, choreography, science, and set design. As a result, the SEM enables learners to capitalize on their strengths and areas of interest, and provides multiple entry points into the curricula.
- In four of seven classes, teachers asked open-ended and higher-order questions, encouraged students to turn and talk, and provided scaffolds such as modeling to support all learners. However, there was limited evidence of sustained, high quality student-to-student discussion, of student initiation of inquiry, and of student mastery of challenging content. Across classrooms, while teachers challenged students through well-designed activities and assignments, students did not always have an opportunity to reflect on their learning and to consolidate their understanding.
- Across classrooms, teaching practices were aligned to the curricula, and were informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. In a literacy class, for instance, students were explicitly taught how to draw inferences from a text; in another fourth grade ICT class, students worked with a partner to highlight two pieces of textual evidence to explain why the setting was important to the story.
- Across classrooms, the use of scaffolds, such as multiple approaches to a single task, use of academic vocabulary, and questioning strategies, such as open-ended questions and pair-share, consistently provided multiple entry points into the curricula. In a math classroom, for instance, the teacher created a chart not in students' workbooks to illustrate the difference between gallon and pint, invited students to explain their thinking by asking questions such as, "What do you notice?" and used multiple means of representation to solidify students' understanding of different units of measurement. Similarly, in another math classroom, students had to draw a picture to show how a pizza pie would be divided equally, write a fraction to express the same mathematically, and explain in writing the steps they took to arrive at the solution.

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 and systematically analyze teacher work, assessment data, and student work. There is effective teacher leadership, and teachers play an integral role in key decisions.

Impact

The deliberate and structured work of teacher teams has directly impacted student learning by strengthening the professional capacity of teachers. Well-defined team structures enable teachers to play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share, and make the necessary adjustments to their pedagogy to improve student outcomes. For instance, based on the results of the fourth grade post-assessment, teachers decided to remove Bend 4 from the curriculum: “Writing responses to realistic fiction as essayists” and to focus instead on teaching how to write stronger conclusions. Similarly, school leadership indicated that after administering a post-assessment, teachers determined that students were struggling with subtraction. Teachers then created goals for students for the next unit. After finalizing goals and determining grouping, they tried various resources to see what would work better, such as interactive writing and dramatization, so that they could help students grasp the concept of subtraction.
- Teacher teams utilize professional collaborations to implement school wide instructional practices and to embed the CCLS and instructional shifts to promote achievement for all learners. The school’s teams include grade teams at each grade level, core (vertical) and grade level inquiry teams in math, Professional Development committee, Integrated Co-Teaching team, Response to Intervention team, Learning Support team, Attendance team, and the Measures of Student Learning committee. Each team meets regularly to examine data, design interventions, and implement next steps, thus continuing the cycle of inquiry.
- Teacher teams organize inter-visitations, with support from school leadership, and examine classroom practice with specific lenses: questioning and discussion, assessment, student engagement to deepen and cross-pollinate promising pedagogical practices and to positively impact student performance.
- School leaders and teachers offer specific examples of teacher leadership that illustrate how teachers and teacher leaders play a vital role in school level decision-making. School leaders state that all teacher teams have one member who is part of the core team. This core team ensures vertical alignment and core team members then turnkey the inquiry work back to their own teams. The chapter chair indicates that each team has a team leader, and school leaders encourage teachers to take turns facilitating during the weekly professional learning time, by rotating the position of the team leader as appropriate.