



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Elias Bernstein Intermediate School

Intermediate School R007

**1270 Huguenot Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10312**

Principal: Nora De Rosa

Date of review: December 4, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Jessica Jenkins

The School Context

Elias Bernstein is an intermediate school with 1,230 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 1% Black, 8% Hispanic, 87% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	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 consistently convey high expectations to staff through the Danielson Framework for Teaching and in ongoing professional learning. Strong family engagement supports parents in understanding their children's progress in school and communicates high expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

High expectations result in a culture of mutual accountability, collaboration, and buy-in on the part of teachers, and leaders, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to the academic needs of all students. School leaders successively partner with families to support student progress and ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents spoke enthusiastically about the rigorous learning environment across grades and subjects. They articulated how teachers continually engage in the revision of tasks to ensure that students have access to the curricula and are engaged in academic tasks that support college readiness such as rigorous reading, peer-to-peer discussion, and critical thinking through problem solving. Additionally, parents communicated the value of Pupilpath, which provides real-time access to assignments, due dates, and performance, as well as a clear picture of what the student must master to move to the next grade.
- Frequent cycles of formal and informal observations and consistent feedback provide to all teachers with clear expectations for professional growth. A schedule of frequent focused inter-visitations in which teams of teachers led by instructional coaches visit their colleagues, engage all staff in a practice of norming and the development of a shared understanding of the school's high expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching.
- An instructional cabinet consisting of the principal, assistant principals, and coaches work cohesively in a learning-focused environment supportive of students and adults and measured by improvement in instruction and in the quality of student learning. Reflective practices and structures support a culture of learning throughout the community. For example, the instructional cabinet meets twice weekly to discuss and track observed promising practices as well as areas in need of further development. Consequently, instructional coaches provide targeted support through planning and modeling of lessons as well as through ongoing teacher team support that is documented and analyzed to illustrate improvements in pedagogy.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teacher pedagogy demonstrates instructional coherence, a variety of teaching strategies that provides all students access into the curricula, and student work products that reflects high levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

Lessons across core content areas are facilitated using shared instructional approaches and strategies, providing all learners with opportunities to engage in rigorous tasks and rich peer-peer discussions, resulting in consistent ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In a seventh grade social studies class, students were observed engaging in a Socratic seminar discussing the driving forces behind the Boston Massacre. Students were required to use text evidence and accountable talk in a peer-to-peer discussion, while the teacher and partnering students assessed participation, the use of content vocabulary, and references to text evidence.
- In a sixth grade English language arts class, students utilized annotation strategies to track and analyze central ideas across thought-provoking texts such as, *The Lost Boys of Sudan*, analyzing the refugee experience as they covered the African continent on foot, searching for their families and safety. In mixed-ability groups, students explored how these children endured hardship through a series of open-ended questions.
- Eighth grade math tasks incorporate authentic activities that connect students to the real world using scientific notion. For example, students explored internet connections across companies who boast that their wireless access points have the greatest range, determining which company had the greatest range using scientific notation. In another open-ended question, students assumed the role of a voting member of the International Astronomical Union who determined the classification of Pluto was based entirely on the length of the diameter and were required to vote to keep Pluto a planet or reclassify it using precise mathematical language.
- The instructional cabinet articulated that across classrooms, teachers were focused on higher level thinking questions and tasks that promote student discussion and allow the students opportunities to explore the standard deeply. Although the vast majority of teachers utilized strategies to promote discussion and addressed multiple entry points, a couple classrooms demonstrated missed opportunities for deeper student engagement. For example, in a 6th grade math class, students worked to calculate percentage mark-up's by applying proportional reasoning. While the tasks anchored students in real-world problems, teacher-dominated instruction resulted in missed opportunities for student discourse and processing time for students to delve deeper into mathematical thinking.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and teachers critically analyze a variety of summative and formative assessment data, which provide school staff with a comprehensive view of students' strengths and weaknesses and student mastery of Common Core Learning Standards.

Impact

As a result of ongoing critical analysis of student work and assessment data, feedback to students is both meaningful and actionable, resulting in targeted supports to positively impact curriculum, instruction and performance.

Supporting Evidence

- Utilizing backwards design, departments focus on each unit's summative task to create a learning and assessment plan. The assessment plan includes formative tasks to include content, skills, strategies, procedures, rubrics and checklists to support students with meaningful and actionable feedback and to provide teachers with a framework to drive their instruction. One such formative task in social studies required that students utilize numerous political cartoons related to child labor and analyze voice, perspective, and symbols. Furthermore, students were required to explain how the analogy in the cartoon deepens the audience's understanding and importance of the issue. The teacher used these assessment results to drive planning for the remainder of the unit and provided concrete feedback to students aimed at deepening their understanding of voice and perspective.
- Common and authentic assessments measure student mastery of learning standards while simultaneously requiring that students grapple with real-world issues. For example, 8th grade students were asked to use persuasive techniques like symbolism, exaggeration, and analogy to complete a summative written assessment depicting the conditions that the muckrakers exposed throughout the Progressive Era. A carefully designed rubric assessed student's ability to determine central ideas in information texts, their ability to analyze primary and secondary source documents, and the use of persuasive writing techniques. The use of graphic organizers and templates aligned to specific writing genres support students with disabilities.
- After each formative assessment, teacher teams utilize a data analysis template analyzing patterns and trends, implications for instruction, and an additional areas requiring further investigation. For example, for an 8th grade end of module task in math, teachers noted that students reversed the set-up of their ratios. They planned additional lessons focusing on deepening foundational skills and conceptual understanding for ratio and proportions.

Findings

Teachers and school leaders collaboratively write rigorous curricula and utilize available data to refine and deepen academic tasks.

Impact

Rigorous habits are embedded across classrooms and within units that require all learners to think critically and create their own meaning. Teachers use student assessment data to ensure curricula and tasks provide access and are cognitively engaging for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades, curriculum maps reflect learning opportunities for students that emphasize rigorous habits. Through an in depth study of mythology in sixth grade, students read, *The Lightning Thief*, focusing on the novel's many allusions to classic myths. Furthermore, students build their informational reading skills through close reading of texts about the elements of myths and are taught the skills necessary to write a thorough literary analysis focused on theme.
- Across subjects, a Common Core Learning Standards aligned curriculum immerses students with information about the world around them and builds knowledge through content-rich nonfiction that simultaneously builds higher-order thinking skills for all students. For example, social studies maps outline the use of multiple literary sources such as a poem to illustrate the concept of Social Darwinism, a dramatic read aloud to analyze the push-pull factors associated with immigration, and the use of Socratic seminar to anchor students in text. Cross-curricular work in English language arts and social studies creates further opportunities for students to study real-world issues through non-fiction text and primary source documents, supported by the implementation of several units of study from Expeditionary Learning.
- Across maps, there is evidence of teacher refinement of curricula and tasks using assessment data. For example, a series of lessons were added to the first unit of 8th grade math to emphasize number sense after analyzing student data suggesting a lack of mastery in identifying the appropriate operation in word problems. A second example of curricula refinement occurs in grade-level literacy teams where teachers consistently use student-writing samples to plan strategy lessons utilizing small group instruction and then captured on the curriculum map to inform pacing and specific gaps across groups of students.

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

A core of teachers and instructional coaches lead teams in ongoing, inquiry-based professional collaborations and reflections aligned to the school's instructional goals, working collaboratively with a targeted focus on thoughtful implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts.

Impact

The school's commitment to distributive leadership and teacher professional growth builds a cohesive professional learning community resulting in improved teacher practice, provides teachers with input in instructional decision-making which affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Highly effective teachers and instructional coaches are instrumental members of the instructional cabinet in both the creation and modification of curriculum maps as well as in the capacity of model classroom teachers. For example, one special education teacher in the English language arts department has been instrumental in ensuring that units of study reflect the necessary scaffolds to ensure multiple entry points and turnkeys these strategies in grade level and vertical team meetings. This has resulted in improved outcomes for students with disabilities as evidenced by student work products highlighting significant improvement over time.
- In an English language arts teacher team meeting, 6th grade teachers brought samples of written work identified as high, medium, and low to analyze in a unit on Percy Jackson. The team noted a pattern in some students' ability to fully analyze quotes as well as a trend in the higher-performing student work in that these students would benefit from increased opportunities to look at text more analytically. The unit was modified on the spot to include increased small group instruction in the analysis of quotes as well as the inclusion of a more sophisticated task analysis for higher-achieving students.
- Through the network, the school participates in an ambassador program where lead teachers participate in cross-network inter-visitation of promising practices as well as participate in targeted professional development. For example, best practices in math are highlighted through network identification of promising practices in which teachers visit other schools and participate in content-specific professional development around that practice
- An instructional cabinet, consisting of both administration and teachers meet regularly to develop action plans that best utilize the strengths of the staff to create systemic improvement aligned to the school's instructional focus. Furthermore, this group utilizes formative data gathered during learning walks to identify strengths and needs among individual teachers and teams. This information then guides teacher team work around trends and leads to differentiated levels of support such as coaching cycles, intervisitation, and focused common planning efforts around a noted trend such as levels of questioning.