



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

John J. Driscoll

Elementary School R016

**80 Monroe Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10301**

Principal: Vincenza Gallassio

**Date of review: March 25, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio**

The School Context

John J. Driscoll is an elementary school with 615 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 23% Black, 58% Hispanic, 12% White, 5% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 26% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.0%.

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	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	Developing
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teacher teams are engaged in teacher-led structured inquiry based professional collaborations. There are established structures for staff input into instructional decisions.

Impact

Instructional capacity has strengthened teacher collaborations that focus on standards. Teachers' input on instructional decisions has improved student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- During a vertical team meeting, K-5 teachers used the Collaborative Assessment Conference protocol to analyze student Common Core aligned assessments across grades 3 through 5. Teachers worked in groups to determine students' areas of strength and focus. Across all grades, teachers determined that students were in need of support in understanding task questions and making the correct choices on multiple-choice questions. One strategy discussed was developing questions and offering two possible response pathways to engage students in deep conversations around determining which choice works best and explaining their rationales for their decisions.
- During interviews, teachers discussed different ways school-wide inquiry works towards meeting school goals. Teachers reported that all teams develop three higher-order thinking (HOT) topics, or goals to work on after reviewing student assessments. For example, after reviewing second grade assessments, three HOT topics chosen to focus on in improving writing were the use of transition words and linking words, and developing stronger conclusion statements. Teachers shared strategies such as introducing different ways to end closing statements with use of a question, a quote, or a message.
- The vertical team meets monthly to review school-wide student data from periodic assessments. Based on exam results, teachers on the team reported that they develop methodologies and strategies to implement to address student learning needs. For example, teachers noticed that students demonstrated difficulty in math numeracy and fluency. The team decided to implement math drills, which is now a school-wide practice. Teachers stated they are noticing that the majority of students are demonstrating progress in this area after a review of current assessments.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies reflect inconsistencies in demonstrating the school's core beliefs on how students learn best as informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school is in the process of reflecting the schools' core beliefs.

Impact

Work products and student responses that enable higher order thinking are uneven across classes.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders stated the core beliefs and instructional focus emphasize differentiation, critical thinking, and independent learning. Administrators reported that evidence of these practices is evident through small group instruction, incorporation of multiple entry points, and rigorous questioning and student discussion. Although lesson plans reflect evidence of planning rigorous questions to support higher thinking, evidence of instructional focus varied across classrooms. For example, during a third grade dual language math class, the teacher formed a small strategy group on fractions as a result of observing student difficulty during the minilesson. The teacher used coaching methods, modeling, and fraction strips to assist struggling students with the fraction concept. Additionally, pre-planned group tasks based on student ability were provided to students who completed their assignments. However, this level of differentiation was not evident across classrooms. In a kindergarten dual language class, however, only some students were provided with targeted questioning when they were unable to demonstrate knowledge and verbalize how they could count to 100 in multiples of fives and tens.
- Students with disabilities demonstrated difficulty with certain tasks due to a lack of teaching strategies to serve as entry points. In a third grade self-contained science class, student responses to questions such as "What are some ways people can protect themselves from viruses entering their bodies?" demonstrated misunderstandings with responses such as, "not covering your mouth after sneezing." The teacher provided additional questions to assist with understanding, however, only some students were targeted and able meet the objective of the activity, In a second grade class, students were all provided the same graphic organizer to assist them with opinion writing. Student work products ranged from some students being unable to construct simple sentences to other students who cited text evidence in defend their written opinion.
- Across classrooms, instruction was mostly teacher directed and higher order thinking evident in only some classes, with some students. For example, in one fifth grade math class, responses to most of the questions, such as, "What part of the whole is one half?" "What part is one third of three quarters?" were teacher monopolized. Although students were prompted to go into discussion groups to answer questions posed, only a few students cited strategies such as, "We shouldn't count by numbers" and "We should use equations to get to our answer like fifth graders. In an ELA/science class, students were asked to find the main idea of non-fiction text reading on the earth's crust. All students were provided the same semantic map graphic organizer to assist them in understanding the main idea of the text. However, students written responses were mostly recalled details about the earth's mantle, crust, and core such as, "The top layer of the earth's crust is the mantle." "The visible part is the earth."

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school utilizes a curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts which emphasize rigorous questions. Teachers make refinements to curricula and strategies so that all students have access.

Impact

Using student data results when planning for rigor across the curricula result in the consistent engagement of students and school-wide instructional coherence.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Ready Gen for English language arts (ELA) and GoMath curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. To supplement the ELA units in ReadyGen, school leaders made decisions to use the Teachers College Reading and Writing curricula for process writing to integrate the instructional shifts on citing evidence and opinion writing. In science and social studies, teacher created lessons and curriculum maps integrate Ready Gen materials and teaching points reflecting alignment to the Common Core standards. For example, Kindergarten ELA weather unit objectives require students to answer questions about key details in a text and describe the connection between pieces of information, both aligned to Common Core Standards reflecting use of key ideas and details, and integration of knowledge and ideas.
- Lessons reflect unit refinement for groups of students, especially English language learners. For example, one ELA task on using visuals to understand ideas in a text was refined from the original unit by including online learning modules that had a greater number of visual supports to be assigned to designated ELLs. In math, a third grade lesson plan reflected two groups working on an online math module and one group using manipulatives which spirals the concept of fractions to respond to a task on equivalent fractions. Assignments were based on student responses to on demand assessments in class.
- A review of student work and curricula demonstrates emphasis on rigorous essential and guided questions. For example, one Kindergarten ELA lesson plan indicated how students were required to support their thinking with text evidence responding to questions such as, “How does the writer use words to share details about the topic?” and “How does the writer use pictures to share details about the topic?” A fifth grade math lesson required students to use math models in multiplying fractions to produce a response to the question, “How can you use an area model to show the product of two fractions?” and “Explain how your current model would change if the problem were five sixths times one-half.”

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The use of rubrics and common assessments provide teachers and students with actionable feedback on student progress towards set goals.

Impact

Students and teachers get actionable feedback that provides them with an understanding of academic achievement. Data analysis results in adjustments in curricula and development of multiple strategies toward improving student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Standards based rubrics are used across grades and subject areas. Students are provided rubric-based feedback from their teachers verbally and in writing. During an interview, students were able to articulate their strengths and areas of focus using rubrics and teacher feedback. For example, after reviewing her report, one second grade student used her rubric and stated she did well on “plot structure and focus” but needed to work on “adding more dialogue and a stronger conclusion”. In math, a fourth grade student stated that she had set a goal with the help of her teacher to work on understanding multiples to help her with fractions, based on feedback from the teacher that this was an area in need of improvement.
- Teacher teams engage in data review on a weekly basis in ELA and math. Teachers analyze student responses on performance based assessments, determine trends across the grade and discuss ways to adjust curricula and instruction. For example, a review of team minutes revealed that first grade teachers reviewed their own class responses to a performance task and brought their analysis to one of their weekly meetings. Trends across the grade indicated that all students needed further support on descriptive words, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure. The team decided to emphasize these skills regarding use of details and descriptive words to support student writing. Data analysis provided demonstrated an increase in students’ use of supporting details and using descriptive words on another performance task.
- The second grade team representatives reported that based on an analysis of a recent performance task, they noted that students were not performing as well on multiple choice questions as they did in responding to open-ended questions. Additionally, after reviewing student responses, teachers reported that students were demonstrating difficulty with the skill of identifying the main idea. Teachers incorporated additional multiple-choice questions at the end of each lesson to assess student learning in order to determine student interventions. One second grade ELA unit plan provided showed how multiple choice questions, especially for main idea, served as exit slips for all lessons.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leadership has created structures to communicate high expectations and uses feedback to hold teachers accountable. The school consistently communicates expectations and offers feedback to families to help parents understand their child's progress.

Impact

School wide systems of accountability and ongoing feedback to all constituents are leading to improvement of student progress toward instructional expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders primarily use training opportunities to communicate their expectations towards teaching and learning, as well as an instructional that focuses on students becoming independent learners and having differentiated support. For example, the professional development plan consists of multiple onsite and online workshops and teacher directed training opportunities on small group instruction and using the iPad and other technology to support differentiation. A book study on teaching reading in small groups communicates the schools expectations for pre-planned strategy grouping to support struggling students.
- Feedback from teacher observations serve as means to provide professional support as well as communicate the school's instructional focus on differentiation and independent learning and hold teachers accountable. Teachers reported that observation feedback has been supportive. One teacher reported feedback from an observation during a book club lesson was positive yet provided strategies "to move the clubs to next level". Strategies suggested by administration included further defining roles and exploring different types of roles when preparing for book club sessions. The teacher stated that she revisited her plans and incorporated suggestions made. A review of observation data demonstrates increases from effective to highly effective planning practices in domain one for several teachers.
- The school communicates their expectations using variety of structures such as the parent handbook and notices sent home. For example, the parent handbook provides the parents with the school mission and vision statement, which states that the school promotes a "21st century experience that will ultimately create critical thinkers and lifelong learners" and "encourages problem solving and collaboration". Parents reported that the quarterly progress reports containing their child's assessment information are sent home. Additionally, parents reported that teachers communicate their child's progress in school via phone calls, emails and one-to-one conversations. To assist parents with understanding the expectations based on the Common Core Standards, the school offers homework help to students and parents twice per week. One parent reported that this program has expanded from being offered once a week last year to twice a week this year due to increased parent attendance which was evidenced by parent sign-in sheets.