



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Totten Intermediate School

R034

**528 Academy Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10307**

Principal: John Boyle

**Date of review: December 18, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jessica Jenkins**

The School Context

Totten is an intermediate school with 1,167 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 12% Hispanic, 84% White, 3% Asian students and 1% other. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 20% 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 95.6%.

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

Instructional leaders, teacher teams, and staff have established a culture for learning that strategically and systematically communicates high expectations, encouraging families and teachers to work collaboratively toward improving student achievement. School leaders and staff are unwavering in their commitment to high standards of classroom practice through ongoing professional learning and intentional and individualized support.

Impact

School leaders, parents, staff, and students work in partnership, resulting in mutual accountability for student achievement, providing a well-defined path towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders embrace teacher, student, and parent voice in the creation of the school's instructional focus and worked collaboratively with each constituent group to create three school-wide bottom lines reflecting each constituent's commitment to the work. For example, a parent group worked collaboratively on a parent bottom line to motivate their child to do their best, monitor their progress and to encourage them to monitor their own progress, giving them the ability to recognize their own personal strengths and weaknesses. Internal computerized surveys on a scale of 1-5 indicate a 2.2% increase in teacher ownership of the school-wide instructional focus in November and an increase of 2.5% for parents after having participated on a committee to create the school's parent bottom lines.
- A large group of teachers from across content areas collaboratively created a common lesson plan template deeply aligned to Danielson's Framework. This template is utilized in planning daily lessons, resulting in coherence across classrooms and a deep understanding of effective and highly effective teaching practices connected to college and career readiness.
- Strategic teacher-led professional development offerings capitalize on teacher strengths through "a la carte" menus based on best practices observed through teacher inter-visitiation as well as through informal and formal observations conducted by school leaders. Through a well-defined instructional focus including teacher bottom-lines, teachers have committed to ongoing reflection and refinement of their practices through professional collaboration evidenced in classroom practice and related student work.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers facilitate learning experiences that require students to grapple with rigorous tasks and engage in discourse that reflects ownership of learning and in depth thinking. Across grades and content areas, teaching practices reflect a sound set of beliefs about how students learn best and are informed by ongoing and strategic planning across teacher teams and instructional cabinet.

Impact

As a result of having access to appropriately challenging tasks and supports, all learners demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student discussion and work products. However, in some classrooms, students were offered limited opportunities for in depth student discourse or processing time to delve deeper and take ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In a seventh grade math class, students worked in readiness groups to determine if a linear equations is proportional by creating a rate table, graph, and an equation. Questions were differentiated based on data gathered in the prior day's lesson. Midway through the exploration phase of the lesson, students self-assessed their progress and were asked to determine if they needed a reference sheet from the differentiation station while students who had mastered the concept were provided choice extension questions to deepen their thinking.
- In a sixth grade integrated co-teaching English language arts (ELA) class world wonders unit, students rotated through stations to examine the Statue of Liberty using a station protocol. At one station, students viewed a short video clip and answered higher order thinking questions about the significance of the Statue of Liberty and its preservation. At another station, students explored various allusions and were required to use close reading strategies to unlock the meaning of a poem.
- In an accelerated eighth grade class, students explored various human rights issues using student-generated questions. In one group, students investigated an organization waging a courageous campaign for young women's rights while another group explored how the media and large corporations can work together to address human rights violations in factories. Student-led discussion was driven by above grade level informational text and required that students use textual evidence to support their answers.
- The school's instructional focus is centered on providing students with the resources and strategies necessary to develop skills that can be accessible to them independently, in group settings, as well as in real-life situations beyond the classroom. Although the vast majority of teachers utilize strategies to promote student ownership of learning and independent thinking, a couple classrooms demonstrated missed opportunities for student ownership. For example, in a seventh grade social studies class, students analyzed political cartoons and made inferences through a gallery walk. However, teacher-dominated instruction interrupted student think time and resulted in missed opportunities for in depth student discourse and processing time for students to delve deeper into the analysis of the cartoons.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across grades and content areas, curricula is aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and thoughtfully embed the instructional shifts to ensure that all students have access to rigorous and cognitively engaging tasks that promote college and career readiness.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions and even level of implementation results in coherence and rigor in lesson planning across grade and content areas, that ensures all academic tasks include multiple entry points, and require in depth thinking and application, essential to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- In sixth grade ELA, students explore whether or not society has a duty to preserve world wonders for future generations and are required to construct an argumentative essay using claims and counterclaims through careful analysis of a variety of texts. For English language learners and students with disabilities, teachers determined key concepts for the unit and defined language objectives including structure, content and academic specific vocabulary necessary for students to understand to fully immerse themselves in the unit.
- A sample accelerated eighth grade ELA unit plan immerses students in tenth grade standards through an in depth study of media. Students explore multiple primary source documents to understand how media messages are pervasive and persuasive as well as how the media serves to influence the choices people make. Students are required to differentiate between varied and nuanced points of view, analyze the credibility of sources, and identify bias and make evaluations about the effects of bias upon readers.
- Reading and writing standards are deeply embedded within units of study across subject areas. For example, in a seventh grade science unit, students explore how scientists gather and interpret evidence that Earth is continually changing. The unit culminates with a written product that explores whether or not Bangladesh is at imminent risk for an earthquake.

Findings

The school strategically uses assessments that are thoughtfully aligned to curricula to analyze information on student learning outcomes and effectively adjust instruction based on a careful analysis of formative and summative assessment data.

Impact

As a result of rigorous assessment analysis by teacher teams and the instructional cabinet, the school makes strategic, data-driven decisions about curricula and lesson planning. Embedded school-wide practices have created a culture where teachers continually make effective adjustments to meet the needs of all students, and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- After each unit of study, students are given a common performance task measuring the standards for that particular unit of study. Teachers then analyze the results of the assessment by standard and subgroup to inform their next instructional steps. After the first unit of study in sixth grade ELA, it was determined that a large percentage of students with disabilities did not master determining the central idea of a text. As a result, teachers differentiated the next unit of study to include texts at the students' reading level to explicitly teach the skill of determining central idea. This also informed the first Response to Intervention Cycle.
- A sixth grade narrative module includes the Common Core Standards written in student-friendly language that are addressed throughout the unit and requires that students set goals. For example, students reference their baseline assessments, classroom tasks, group discussions and writing tasks to set a goal for citing textual evidence to support analysis of what the text states. Teachers utilize these goals throughout the unit of study to adjust pacing and as a reflective practice to ensure that students are aware of their learning needs.
- Students in a seventh grade math classroom were observed using a technology application for the purpose of formative assessment. After completing an entrance problem, students held up a student-specific placard that the teacher scanned using an iPad. Students were immediately grouped according to their response. Students articulated that this formative assessment strategy provides the teacher with immediate real-time data allowing them to receive individualized or small group instruction to ensure they master the daily learning target.

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

Distributed leadership structures are embedded through ongoing and structured professional collaborations focused on building shared knowledge of best practice and inquiry that positively impact student achievement.

Impact

A distributive leadership structure ensures that teachers' play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school, and results in improvements in Common Core aligned instructional practice, and increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers engage in ongoing collegial collaboration through common planning. For example, teachers regularly use the looking at student work protocol to determine next learning steps for both individual and groups of students. The instructional cabinet modeled this protocol using a fishbowl strategy, so that teacher observes could closely assess the discussion and deepen their understanding of the skills needed to independently participate in and lead productive discussions of their own in the analysis of student work.
- In one teacher team meeting observed, a group of sixth grade ELA teachers determined that a group of students confused the text's central idea with the author's purpose. As a result, teachers planned a series of mini lessons targeting this skill. This high quality discussion resulting in a targeted action plan demonstrates how the content of the standards and students' thinking drive instructional decision making.
- The sixth grade ELA and seventh grade math team serve as a model for structured group roles and contributions as well as a model for communication in common planning sessions. The social studies and science departments have observed these teams in action, resulting in a school-wide understanding of inquiry protocols. These in depth collaborations have had a direct impact on advanced student achievement evidenced by thorough analysis of common assessments during teaming meetings and intentional shifts in instructional decisions that target the needs of all students.
- Pedagogical strategies that are shared and modeled through common planning and inquiry work are memorialized via Dropbox and observed during informal walkthroughs. When effective and highly practices are memorialized in observation feedback, these teachers are asked to conduct professional learning sessions in order to share best practices and build capacity.