



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Space Shuttle Columbia

Elementary School R058

**77 Marsh Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10314**

Principal: Michael La Morte

**Date of review: March 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio**

The School Context

Space Shuttle Columbia is an elementary school with 804 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 6% Black, 24% Hispanic, 53% White, 14% Asian and 3% other students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 15% 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 93.0%.

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	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	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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Structures and systems are in place to consistently communicate high expectations to staff and to provide feedback to families regarding support of students towards expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

School-wide systems of accountability hold teachers accountable in working toward school goals. On-going feedback to families helps them understand expectations towards college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations using newsletters, memoranda, and emails. For example, the News and Notes weekly newsletters provide staff members with information on deadlines and upcoming professional development opportunities. In the most recent News and Notes, teachers were informed of an upcoming training titled, “Math in the Digital Age”. This training, focusing on higher order thinking in math problem solving, is in alignment with the school's instructional foci on determining measurable growth in problem solving and student engagement. A review of professional development agendas, notes, and handouts reflect trainings on planning for rigorous instruction and student engagement. In addition, as per the school administration, the communication of expectations occurs through trainings on the Danielson Framework for Teaching and norming around the framework's rubric requirements as related to the school-wide expectations. One of the school's Comprehensive Education Plan goals this year is to ensure the majority of teachers engage in highly effective practices. For example, one recent training consisted of teachers reviewing and identifying key points in the Advance rubric for differences between effective and highly effective ratings for 1b, demonstrating knowledge of students, and 3c, engaging student learning.
- Feedback to teachers is ongoing throughout the year. Teachers meet in one-to-one sessions with assistant principals to review lesson objectives relative to school-wide expectations, observation performance, and obtain feedback towards their lesson planning as it relates to school goals. The administration provides feedback on the school's instructional focus on student engagement through post observation conferences. A review of teacher feedback trends in comments and suggestions included allowing for more turn and talk opportunities and productive struggle to support student engagement. Teachers report that they find feedback and training opportunities helpful.
- The parent handbook provides families with the school's expectations on homework, offers strategies to ensure student success, and information on how to access academic information from class websites. In addition, phone calls and emails from administration and staff inform parents of student progress towards meeting standards and school-wide expectations. Workshops on testing requirements and math strategies, and family class visits help parents understand what is expected relative to the Common Core Standards. One parent stated that a teacher modeled a math lesson to help parents understand “the new strategies and requirements of the standards”. A parent explained that this has helped her support her child as she is now aware of whether her child's work is correct or not.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teacher practices provide strategies to serve as entry points for challenging tasks and student discussion. Strategies and extensions for learning, however, are not always strategically planned.

Impact

Opportunities for extended learning and demonstration of the highest levels of student ownership in their work vary due to inconsistencies in strategic application of entry points.

Supporting Evidence

- In several classrooms, teachers engaged students in challenging work, which required reasoning and thought. For example, in a first grade English language arts (ELA) class, students were asked to determine whether a character in a book would be successful selling lemonade in the winter. Students worked with their partners to develop reasons relative to the task and offered solutions if they disagreed. However, in some classrooms, higher level supports were varied. In one third grade ELA class, students were asked mostly recall and low inference questions such as, “Why do animals migrate?”, “When do they migrate?” and “How long do they stay there?” by the teacher. Some of the students did not answer the posed questions correctly or provided low level, one word responses.
- During a social studies debate, students were involved in a Socratic seminar and asked to determine which civilization made the greatest contribution. A student introduced and facilitated the activity. The teacher supported students by prompting them to keep good eye contact and to take notes throughout the activity. Other students were assigned as peer-observers and used a rubric to assess performance and provide feedback. Students presented and argued their point of view while other students provided counterclaims towards those statements. For example, one student stated, “To exercise my opinion, I personally feel that the Mayans contributed to the civilization as they never stopped learning and came up with the principle of zero.” However, this level of student ownership and independence in task work while evident across classrooms was not evident across the vast majority of classrooms.
- During a fourth grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) science lesson, students were provided with a task card and materials for completing a lab assignment. Some students with disabilities were able to provide work products reflecting higher order thinking and the use of science vocabulary such as, “The train is levitating because on the top of the track, the magnets are on the north side...” using drawings to support their writing but others just listed facts. Although the task was planned using scaffolds and extensions such as partnerships, checklists, and choice of graphic organizers, these did not assist all students. One student demonstrated a lack of understanding of the purpose and importance of the activity stating that the learning objective was important because it was part of their chapter. Some others were able to make a connection of the importance of the task to the enduring understanding that, “Magnets can operate on objects across distances...” and “Electricity can be helpful or harmful to people.” For example, one student stated, “Cranes and household appliances use electro-magnets to work.” “Cars and planes contain motors that use magnets ... we need them (magnets) to help create electricity so we can get around.”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school makes purposeful decisions in utilizing curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and in incorporating instructional shifts. Teachers make databased decisions to make refinements to curricula, tasks, and strategies.

Impact

Purposeful planning builds coherence within curriculum promoting college and career readiness and access to engaging curricula for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Common Core aligned ReadyGen and GoMath curricula from kindergarten to grade 5. Additionally, the school has opted to supplement the Ready Gen program with Teacher College writing models, evident in several writing lesson plans which contain the workshop structure of a minilesson, independent practice and sharing. A review of pacing calendars indicates that the school is focused on integrating learning targets on informative/explanatory writing and reading. Furthermore, the school integrates literacy targets into their Harcourt science and social studies program. For example, a grade four science plan indicated inclusion of target Informational text literacy standards of Key Ideas and Details (RL4.3) to explain events and ideas using textual evidence and Integration of Knowledge (RL4.9) to integrate information from two texts in order to write about subjects knowledgeably.
- A review of student work and curricula demonstrates the integration of tasks requiring textual analysis across content areas. For example, a first grade ELA lesson plan indicated how students were required to support their thinking with text evidence responding to questions such as, “What does the text and illustrations tell us about the setting?” “How does the author use indoor illustrations to show that it is winter?” A fifth grade social studies lesson required students to imagine themselves as one of the founding fathers and answer the question, “What do you think some of the biggest obstacles would be in creating a government?” defending their answers by citing textual details from reading materials.
- A review of several lesson plans reflects use of grouping and modified tasks to provide all students including students with disabilities access to the curricula. Lessons reflect the use of student data to inform the purpose of the lesson and grouping. For example, in one 3rd grade ELA lesson, the teacher stated the lesson was taught based on recent results on benchmark assessment data, which reflected that the majority of the students needed more work on compare and contrast. The plans reflected, based on their performance, that students were grouped by different topics to independently practice the skill using paired passages and conduct a group discussion based on what they read. One group received two texts and was asked to answer a set of questions while other groups received tiered texts at the students reading level, to complete the task. A review of other lesson plans reflect similar planning with student data being used to modify tasks from the original curriculum.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, assessments are aligned to the curricula and are used to monitor student progress towards goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

Teachers and students benefit from actionable feedback regarding student achievement. Teacher teams' are knowledgeable about student progress and thus make effective curricula and instructional adjustments.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use multiple assessments including citywide performance tasks, running records, ReadyGen, and Go Math benchmark assessments, and rubrics aligned to the school curricula to inform them of student progress. During interviews, administration and teachers noted how these assessments provided information on the skills mastered. For example, a review of benchmark assessment data revealed that students in the school's bottom third need more academic support in comprehension and solving word problems. Targeted students were placed in academic intervention programs in ELA and math. In addition, kindergarten - second grade performance based assessments indicated that the majority of students needed more support in writing, specifically in grammar and punctuation. This resulted in a change in rubrics and backward planning in the ELA curricula to emphasize criteria for grammar and discussions with students regarding the need to edit their work throughout the writing process.
- A review of student work folders and conference notes indicated that teachers provide feedback to students consistently across classes. According to teachers, feedback is provided verbally and in writing. Work folders demonstrated that students used rubrics and teachers gave written comments. During an interview, students provided input as to how teachers provided feedback to them. One student stated that through feedback she learned that her "organization and idea development was good" but that she needed to work on "language and vocabulary usage" in making revisions for her published piece. Her conference sheet indicated that the strategy she should use to help with future pieces is rereading aloud to make sure the writing looks and sounds correct. Another student stated she did well on her "structure and organization" but needed to work on "adding more text details. Other students provided similar responses.
- Instructional teacher teams in ELA and math review assessments with the data specialist to determine the needs of students and determine ways to adjust instruction. According to teachers, adjustment of instruction takes form through flexible groupings in strategy lessons. Based on a review of common assessments, teacher teams have developed a list of needs identified from item analysis reports. The trend report indicates that across the school students need more support in writing for information, organization, main idea, retelling, and questioning. In addition, based on teacher observations, students' need strategies on developing their stamina while close reading passages. Grouping of students to support these areas was revealed in lesson plans across subject areas. For example, in an ELA/social studies lesson, students were grouped in three stations and provided different questions per group such as, "How do we honor Lewis, Clark, and Sacagawea today?" and "How did Sacagawea assist Lewis and Clark in expanding westward?" to respond using text evidence and graphic organizers to organize their thinking.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Teachers are integrating instructional shifts within Common Core aligned curricula, improving the quality of instruction. Teacher leaders are adjusting curricula decisions to ensure students' needs are being met.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly and have developed structures including agendas, protocols, minutes, and other supplemental materials, to support inquiry aimed at increasing students' progress. The focus of these meetings encompasses an integration of the school goals around engaging students in complex text, citation of evidence, and the use of academic vocabulary.
- The ELA teacher team used a protocol to evaluate a kindergarten student's written piece about creating an animal and its habitat, recording their findings on a note-taking template to document next steps for teaching practices. Teachers stated that the student needed to elaborate further in her writing to say more about the animal and why the habitat chosen would work best for it. As a strategy, teachers suggested that the student be asked to elaborate on pre-writing sketches first and add action words to support the story.
- Teachers take the lead in facilitating multiple teams across the school including grade inquiry, ELA, math, cross-data, and other school-wide teams. Decisions and requests from teams regarding changes to curricula and instruction are honored by the administration. For example, both administration and teachers reported that based on recent review of student work and data, changes to curricula pacing calendars were made in several grades to change the flow of curriculum throughout the year. For example, in the fifth grade informational writing unit, the original curriculum had many lessons dedicated to brochure writing focused on production of work products. Analyzing students' responses in former units of study, teachers recognized that students needed more time for revising their work and that students especially needed to be taught lessons on using transition words. Concerns were voiced to the administration through the team leaders and resulting adjustments were made to the curriculum to incorporate four lessons on revising in the upcoming unit. In addition, the pacing of ELA units were revisited and readjusted based on Kindergarten and second grade data. In math, the first grade team adjusted pacing of the units to ensure students received more instructional support in learning their addition and subtraction facts before moving into more complex numeracy and operation problems. Furthermore, the ELA cross-data team teachers indicated that teachers have offered suggestions to the administration for supplemental texts to support varied student needs, which were honored and provided.