



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The Staten Island School of Civic Leadership**

**Elementary–Middle School R861**

**280 Regis Drive  
Staten Island  
NY 10314**

**Principal: Donna Nilsen**

**Date of review: January 29, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Miatheresa Pate**

## The School Context

The Staten Island School of Civic Leadership is an elementary-middle school with 853 students from grade Kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 22% Black, 40% Hispanic, 24% White, and 12% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 11% 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 93.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training around those expectations. School leaders and staff keep families informed about expectations for students linked to college and career readiness.

### Impact

Structures at the school result in a cultural of mutual accountability among staff and establish a successful partnership with families to support student progress.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school provides teachers with a handbook and memoranda titled, “Bottom Line Notices”, to ensure school-wide expectations are communicated. For instance, “Bottom Line Notice # 41”, set an expectation that, “all students will engage in a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Initiative called The Mannhatta 2409 Project, to prepare them for the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century college and careers...” During teacher and student interviews, it was revealed that students are involved in the STEM Initiative. For instance, students stated that they engage in an interactive website that lets them see an overlay of the existing land uses in the city, and allows for modifications based on options from a toolbox. Tasks include opportunities for students to add a streetcar system, extend a subway line, ban automobiles, eliminate buildings entirely, and add green roofs. Additionally, a review of teacher professional development calendar delineated teacher planning sessions that are directly linked to the Bottom Line Notices. Furthermore, teacher meeting feedback addresses the Bottom Line Notices as well.
- The administration and parents revealed that they engage in parent workshops on Common Core, subject content, and assemblies that offer guidance on college and career readiness. Parents stated that teachers send updates via a “Remind 101” text system, progress reports, report cards, the open door policy, and through the interaction with the parent coordinator who serves a liaison between the administration, teachers, and families. Parents reported that their ability to reach teachers about homework, project assignments, and what they can do at home to support the academic growth of their child was, “helpful because the material is very challenging...and they need help too....”
- The school uses a “Triad” approach to teaching in grades K-5 classrooms which include three teachers in every classroom. The administration stated this approach creates a successful partnership around planning and preparation by holding each other accountability to this expectation. Additionally, the administration expects teachers to refer to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and organize their lesson plans to include the elements identified in component 1e on designing coherent instruction. The review of lesson plans revealed that teachers have the adhered to this as a Triad group.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Although the school provides consistent instructional strategies, including questioning and discussion techniques, the use of high quality supports and extensions that foster deep reasoning varies across the school.

### Impact

Across some classrooms, extensions and supports into the curricula do not yet lead to higher order thinking and ownership for all learners to produce meaningful work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classes, students were observed using scaffolds such as graphic organizers in small groups, teacher modeling, visuals, the use of a smart board video clips, and the review of leveled text. During the observation of an English language arts (ELA) class, students viewed a video on elephants. In small groups, students discussed facts they learned from the text and the video to complete a graphic organizer which required students to turn and talk to complete the chart.
- During an observation of an English language arts class, students were engaged in a Socratic seminar in which students generated their own questions and engaged in peer dialogue. However, this practice was not observed in the majority of classrooms visited. In majority of classes visited, students participated in class discussion by responding to teacher-generated questions.
- The administration noted that “students are pushed to ask each other higher-order thinking questions in discussion and feel safe to participate because their effort is championed”. During the observation of a 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies classroom, students were provided five leveled articles, samples of exemplar claim/counter claims, and rubrics. Students worked in groups asking clarifying questions to their peers using a teacher developed rubric. However, in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA classroom, students were seated in groups and were answering five teacher generated questions by reviewing an article to find the answer. During this observation, students were not observed asking each other higher-order thinking questions or engaged in high levels of discussion.

# Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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## Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that instructional shifts are strategically integrated into the Common Core aligned curricula and ensure rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks.

## Impact

The school's curricular decisions on curricula and tasks, have built coherence and college readiness resulting in all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), across grades and subject areas, demonstrating their thinking.

## Supporting Evidence

- Across content areas and grade levels, a variety of tasks embed scaffolds for all students to demonstrate higher order skills. For instance, a kindergarten lesson plan showed the use of visual aids such as 10 frames and smart board virtual work product samples. In addition, a third grade lesson plan included the use of graphic organizers. The emphasis of these scaffolds is outlined in all lesson plans reviewed.
- Lesson plans across content revealed integration of the instructional shifts and Common Core Standards. For instance, a grade 3 science/ELA lesson on productive struggle integrated Reading Standards for Informational Text (RI) 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4, requiring students to synthesize information learned from a video and an article to explain why other amphibians are becoming an endangered species. A grade 5 math lesson on adding and subtracting fractions integrated standards such as Number and Operations—Fractions 5.1, which requires students to determine how to add and subtract fractions with unlike denominators and to be able to use equivalent fractions to as a strategy. The same lesson revealed supports for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) via teacher modeling, data based student groups, tiered vocabulary supports, video clips, and fraction strips.
- The professional learning calendar revealed a series of sessions focused on building coherence in the school's curricula. For instance, the professional learning calendar noted in multiple sessions, activities were aimed at embedding the Common Core Learning Standards into curriculum maps, lessons, tasks, assessments, and rubrics. Additionally, a review of curriculum maps reflected performance tasks and lesson plans with a strategic focus on academic vocabulary. Furthermore, the review of the November/December 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELA unit map revealed the integration of the instructional shift on citing textual evidence to support the analysis of what students write, prompts to engage in peer collaborative discussions around texts, and argumentative writing to embed strong claims.

**Findings**

The school uses common assessments to determine student progress and consistently reflect the use of on-going checks for understanding and self-assessment.

**Impact**

The school regularly monitors student progress towards goals via data analysis to adjust curriculum and instruction. During class instruction, teachers make effective adjustments to meet students' academic needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school uses common assessments across content areas which provide teachers with student progress and performance data. For instance, the school uses Fountas & Pinnell Benchmarks, Ready Gen, and Code X mid-unit and end-unit assessments. In the upper grades, the school uses CMP3 unit assessment. Across grades, where applicable the school uses New York City Performance Assessment Baselines.
- Across classrooms, teachers were observed using rubrics, student self-assessment check-lists all germane to the task and assisted in making adjustments. Adjustments observed were the use of teacher modeling, and visual aids for support. For instance, during a third grade class, students self-assessed their prior knowledge on elephants using a post-it system that required students to determine if they believe their level was that of expert, practitioner, or novice. Additionally, in a sixth grade classroom, the teacher was observed conferring with students and based on student outcomes, stopped the class to re-model the activity for students. The teacher stated, "I noticed some common mistakes happening and I need to re-teach this."
- The school has an assessment tracking tool for all core content areas and tracks student outcomes by levels, percentage increase or decrease in proficiency, and standard strengths and weaknesses across grades in math and ELA. The school provides teachers with class data that highlights performance levels below 50% proficiency. Teachers reported that they use the school generated math and ELA test item analyses to determine their instructional areas of focus in preparation for the benchmark tests and class level assessments such as chapter and unit exams. For example, citing evidence from the text and use of context clues are two areas of focus.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

All teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations aligned to school goals to strengthen instructional capacity, and embed leadership opportunities to empower staff on key instructional decisions in the school.

### Impact

School-wide instructional coherence fosters teachers' ability to play an integral role in decision making that promotes the Common Core Standards resulting in increased student achievement for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- During the observation of a team, teachers were guided by their own agenda. Teachers made reference to the school's instructional focus of productive struggle/biodiversity graph and used a Looking at Student Work (LASW) protocol to examine an individual student as well as determine impact for groups of students. Throughout the meeting, the teachers engaged in a review of material and the connection to science, ELA, social studies, and math. From this review, teachers analyzed strengths, weakness, questions, and next steps for the students they were focused on and the implementation for additional students. The team wrapped up the meeting by identifying next steps for students and the team.
- The vast majority of teachers collaborate on one or more teams including Kindergarten-grade 5 Triad teams, the Vertical Instructional team, and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) team, and all serve as platforms for key decision making around school wide practices. During these team meetings, teachers develop and plan around the school wide instructional practices. For instance, during a team meeting, teachers reported how they collaborated on the implementation of the LASW Atlas protocol across content areas to support the instructional focus around productive struggle. During the observation of a STEM team meeting, teachers analyzed three students' work, tasks and rubrics using an inquiry approach to determine the area of strength, weakness, supports needed, and instructional next steps. In addition, through teacher leadership in the K-5 Triad teams, model teachers develop their own program cards. Teachers reported that the Triad teams determine the time frames for which content areas should be taught during the day to best address student needs.
- A team of teachers conducted a needs assessment/effectiveness survey to determine the impact of a protocol for looking a student work. The survey revealed that the best LASW protocol was Atlas. As a result, teachers redesigned the school-wide team procedures and reflection sheets. For instance, the new procedure added a section that requires teachers to identify their instructional strategies and implications for student learning in reflection sheets.