



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**The Courtlandt School**

**Elementary School X001**

**335 East 152 Street  
Bronx  
NY 10451**

**Principal: Jorge Perdomo**

**Date of review: April 28, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek**

## The School Context

The Courtlandt School is an elementary school with 707 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 21% Black, 75% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% other students. The student body includes 25% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

## 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>Proficient</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>Proficient</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 convey high expectations around professionalism, instruction, and communication to the entire staff. The school successfully partners with families around supporting students towards expectations connected to college and career readiness.

### Impact

The school has established systems that ensure a culture of mutual accountability. Parents are aware and work in collaboration with the school in supporting their children's progress toward becoming college and career ready.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders meet with individual teachers in May and June to discuss in depth the areas of the Danielson Framework that each individual teacher must address in order to improve practices resulting in a detailed initial planning conference/action plan document. The entire instructional staff participates in over 30 or more workshop/trainings that are based upon overall needs. Administration prepares weekly action plans to coordinate targeted classroom walkthroughs as well as formal and informal observations. Staff routinely uses email to provide administrators with specific steps they are taking to address feedback received during observation cycles. Professional Learning team members utilize a classroom inter-visitation tool with specific goals aligned to Danielson components that include pre- and post-visit conversations between the host and visiting teachers. These tools are also shared with administration thereby supporting a culture of mutual accountability regarding teaching expectations.
- The school implements the "Leader in Me" process to improve the culture of the school and to maximize students' academic performance. This philosophy, based on [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) by Stephen Covey, engages the entire school community in activities, lessons, conversations, and celebrations around leadership, positive behavior, and service to the community and gives students leadership roles throughout the building, including classrooms. This process has created a school culture of responsibility, personal accountability, and independence that is crucial to college and career readiness. As a result, the school has experienced a dramatic decrease in behavior problems, referrals, and suspensions throughout the year.
- Parents praise the high level of communication they receive from school staff regarding the progress of their children through progress reports and ongoing phone calls. They support their children's academic progress at home through online reading and math programs and appreciate individual suggestions from teachers. For example, a parent used a stopwatch at home to decrease time on task for her special education child, helping her child build stamina. The school's monthly calendar lists words of the day/week and ongoing workshops conducted to help parents understand the school's vision and mission and the rigors of the common core learning standards. Parents reported that they recently attended health and wellness workshops and a Math through Music workshop taught them how to make maracas with their children out of counted dried beans and hollow cardboard rolls to support math fluency. These practices enable the school to successfully partner with families to support student progress.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

While across classrooms teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, these practices are not yet evident across the vast majority of classrooms. A high level of student thinking and ownership was reflected in some student work products and discussions.

### Impact

In many classrooms students are engaged in appropriately challenging discussions that require higher-order thinking. Assignments and projects elicit high-level student thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers employ a variety of entry points to engage all students in learning. In a fourth grade integrated collaborative teaching class, teachers provided students with leveled "just right" mystery story texts so that students could find textual evidence of how "setting" helps characters to find clues needed to solve the mystery. In a first grade classroom, students worked collaboratively with rekenreks, ten rods, ones cubes, tens and ones mats, and thinking maps to understand place value.
- Aligned to the instructional shifts, students read informational texts and engaged in conversations facilitated by the teacher. For instance, in a science class, after reading numerous articles about water, students participated in sharing information they researched about water. This information will be used to create essays.
- Informed by Danielson's competencies, structures and protocols reflective of the school's philosophy are evident across classrooms. Teachers emphasize vocabulary and utilize thinking maps across grades and subject areas to help students organize their thinking. Students engage in partnership think, pair, share and turn and talk strategies to exchange thoughts and ideas. For example, a fifth grade class shared their thinking as they analyzed an article about Simon Bolivar in small groups to find evidence to support the author's claim that Mr. Bolivar was a liberator, utilizing the "gallery walk" protocol to post their thoughts and findings at various stations set up in the classroom.
- Supports for students with disabilities and English language learners ensured that students participated in the same challenging assignments and tasks through the addition of entry points such as guided small group instruction, vocabulary scaffolds, the use of visuals and thinking maps across grades and subject areas. As a result, the school has met adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets in all areas for the past two years in a row and is rated as "meeting target" in closing the achievement gap in the most recent School Quality Guide.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

The school leader and staff adopt common core aligned curricula across subjects. The curriculum is tailored to provide access to all learners.

### Impact

The school leader's decisions builds curricular coherence across grades and subjects and engages students in challenging tasks that promote thinking and prepares students for college and career.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school selected Teachers College Reading and Writing Units of Study as a basis to design common core aligned English language arts curricula and Go Math. New York City scope and sequence serve as the school's curricula for social studies and science. Science is supplemented with the Foss scientific thinking process activities across grades that use hands on investigations to ensure students "learn by doing".
- Written units in reading and writing provide evidence that students engage in challenging tasks in writing and are required to support their written arguments with evidence from texts read. For example, a third grade social studies unit requires students to read various books about urban, suburban and rural communities that they use for evidence to support non-fiction books they write teaching new students about the different communities. To further align instruction to the common core, the school chose to focus on two instructional shifts in English language arts: academic vocabulary and text-based answers and two instructional shifts in math: fluency and application. Across grades, students are expected to follow the writing process, to utilize vocabulary notebooks and to produce on demand writing.
- To promote higher order thinking and accelerate vocabulary learning for students at all levels of ability, teachers demonstrate the use of Thinking Maps that match the 8 types of thinking our brains use when completing academic work. Through the ongoing use of these maps across grades and subjects, students develop the cognitive language they need to articulate their learning and successfully complete their academic tasks.
- Teachers are provided with common planning time to look at student work and revise units to meet student needs, embedding the use of appropriate thinking maps and close reading strategies into units and flexibly group students for tailored academic tasks.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The school's grading policies and use of common assessments provide all stakeholders with feedback around student progress. Assessment results are used to make curricula modifications.

### Impact

The school uses common assessments and the analysis of data to track student progress and inform adjustments in units and lesson plans.

### Supporting Evidence

- Students and teachers use checklists and genre-specific rubrics designed by both teachers and the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project to monitor student achievement. For example, a prekindergarten/kindergarten/first grade narrative writing rubric lays out explicit expectations in the measured areas across all three grades. A third grade opinion writing rubric uses the same format of listing grade-before and grade-after expectations in measured areas. These school-wide practices enable teachers and students to comprehend the continuum of expectations across grades.
- Teachers use curricula aligned assessments in writing and math to provide students with actionable feedback. Feedback provided informs students of needed areas for improvement. For example, a review of student work reveals feedback to students that addresses key areas of writing such as: punctuation, word choice, transition words, paragraphing, providing examples for reasoning, and citing text evidence to support ideas.
- The school uses a vast array of common assessments to determine student progress and adjust curricula and instruction such as: Independent (whole book) Reading Assessments in grades 2-5, Teachers College reading assessments across grades, Sadlier vocabulary assessments across grades, i-Ready diagnostic and summative assessments in English language arts and math, Spatial-Temporal (ST) math diagnostics and instant feedback progress checks, myOn online tracking of reading comprehension and stamina, and Go Math end of unit assessments. Teachers use these data to design multiple entry points to meet the specific reading needs of their students, create word study groups, and set reading goals for their students. The school intentionally builds vocabulary into curricula and classroom routines because staff has identified a correlation indicating that increased vocabulary ability increases achievement across content areas including math.
- Teachers tend to move around their classrooms listening in on partner talks and summative share-outs to check for student understanding while only some teachers record their assessment findings for future use. Formal assessments take place when teachers review submitted student work products. Students report using rubrics and checklists to self-assess the quality of their writing work and to guide their improvement efforts. In addition, students use quick peer evaluation forms to evaluate each other's work or presentations and group self-evaluation checklists to assess the quality of their partnerships.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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**Findings**

Teacher teams' consistently conduct data analysis and reviews of student work. Distributed leadership structures support leadership development and teacher participation in decision making.

**Impact**

Teacher team work and distributed leadership structures strengthen pedagogical practice and enhance student progress.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher teams meet during weekly common planning periods to conduct inquiry meetings, plan instruction based on student data, and look at student work together. In addition, all teacher teams meet together during Tuesday professional work time to facilitate and share their learning with the rest of the staff. All teams have established norms, protocols and targeted outcomes and are supported by the school's instructional team, literacy and math coaches, network support staff, consultants and staff developers. Teacher teams also meet with administration monthly in order to plan effectively and align practices with school and citywide expectations. Teaching practices are monitored using Advance data from cycles of observation.
- During a teacher team-meeting teachers analyzed two-paragraph essays that students wrote using “double bubble thinking maps” comparing and contrasting Cinderella and Yen Shen (Chinese version) as part a fairytale adaptation unit. After teachers analyzed the essay utilizing a rubric, they provided warm and cold feedback noting that the thinking maps generally helped all students to stay on task and made "next steps" recommendations to the two presenting teachers.
- Teacher teams utilize the same tuning protocol across grades and purposely target English language learners for inquiry work while selecting low, medium, and high student work samples. This focus has enabled the number of students testing out of NYSESLAT to increase dramatically over the past three years.
- The school has created different teacher teams to enhance distributive leadership, communication and implementation of best teaching practices in all grade levels. For example; a school wide leadership team consists of teacher leaders from every grade, a vocabulary team has a representative from each teacher team, and a thinking map leadership team is comprised of teachers from each grade. These teacher leaders turn key information to their peers, provide professional development during Monday Professional Development time, and provide information to parents and families during Tuesday Parent time.