



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Isaac Varian School

Elementary School X008

**3010 Briggs Avenue
Bronx
NY 10458**

Principal: Rosa Maria Peralta

**Date of Review: May 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Hadiya J. Daniel-Wilkins**

The School Context

The Isaac Varian School is an elementary school with 1129 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 12% Black, 76% Hispanic, 7% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 27% English language learners and 23% 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	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	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Findings

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of classroom practices and assessment data for groups of students. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that teacher leaders play a vital role in school level decision-making.

Impact

The work of structured professional collaborations has promoted a system for shared leadership allowing for focused work on improving students' learning and teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams provided data-based rationale and analysis of assessment data that informed their decisions to adjust learning goals and materials. Teachers were observed reviewing data from a mock English language arts (ELA) assessment that was administered to students in grades 3 through 5 in January. Team members had identified the Common Core reading standards as areas of difficulty for students. The analysis resulted in teachers' concluding that an increase in questions to deepen comprehension was a necessary adjustment in instruction to support students' learning. Teachers were witnessed using Blooms taxonomy to design a variety of questions at different processing levels so that diverse groups of students could master grade level reading goals.
- Teachers' analyze student performance data to strategically collaborate with colleagues to determine instructional modifications required to fill learning gaps. For example, teachers shared, "As a team we decided that those of us that work primarily with K-2 students would look more closely at the 3rd grade data with the understanding that what the current 3rd grade (students) are struggling with, is something that we should address in the younger grades." They added, "For example, teachers that work with 3rd graders would look at the current 4th grade ELA data and make instructional decisions that they will implement with the current 3rd graders."
- Teacher teams provided a research-based rationale for making changes to curriculum for the purpose of meeting the learning needs of students across the school. Staff reviewed format, sequence, skills and content in the recommended curriculum for math, and determined the presentation of content did not meet the learning needs of students. Teachers decided to adopt the Envision Mathematics program that presented Common Core aligned units with multiple opportunities for students to problem-solve, engage in mathematical discourse, use manipulatives, and increase academic vocabulary.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Discussions and student work products and discussions reflect consistent levels of cognitive engagement and participation.

Impact

Consistent teacher-generated questions, across classrooms, resulted in missed opportunities for student higher level thinking to demonstrate ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- While students were engaged in turn-and-talk discussions and group book talks, in most classrooms, teachers posed the questions to engender the thinking and participation. For example, teachers were heard asking, “What is the author’s purpose? What do you think? What is essay about? Is the author trying to persuade you? After each question, students were then provided with an opportunity to turn and talk to each other about the questions posed. The instructional shift to increase student-generated questions is evolving.
- Although student work products reflected high levels of thinking, in discussions with students, most explained that the purpose for their tasks was to complete the assignment. For example, when the questions of, “Why are you reading this book?” Or, “Why are you working on this math?” were posed, students responded with, “We are close reading; and we are solving problems.” Students’ responses did not reflect the lesson’s objective noted in teachers’ plans. Opportunities for teachers to consistently clarify lessons’ “learning objectives for deeper thinking with students were missed.
- Teachers provided students occasions to participate in group activities, reading novels and articles. While in some classrooms, they were seen actively interacting with the text with annotations, higher level reading strategies were uneven throughout classes. Occasions for some students to consistently use literacy strategies to support and extend their own retention of content and demonstrate higher order thinking were inconsistent.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned to the school's curricula; teachers' assessment practices ensure ongoing checks for understanding and students' self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers are using rubrics and checklists to make effective instructional adjustments and provide students actionable feedback on task performance to meet learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, teachers analyze units, teacher-designed, Fountas & Pinnell, baseline Teachers College running records, performance tasks, and New York City and State assessments to make classroom and school-level decisions. For example, teachers were heard making decisions, for identified students, to read books at various Lexile levels based on their performance outcomes on assessments.
- Teachers consistently provided feedback to students on tasks and assessment rubrics, during one-to-one conferences, and notations on post-it notes, as comments on achievement. For instance, one teacher noted to a student, "You stated the theme and you only wrote one sentence about the stories. Where are the details? You must make sure you include everything from your checklist for this task."
- Rubrics for tasks are written in first person for students to own their learning through self-assessment. For example, a grade 4 student interviewed presented a, "Continuum for Opinion/Argument Writing Rubric" for review. Highlighted on the rubric was the self-assessment of the following: "I wrote my opinion on my likes/dislikes and gave reasons for my opinion," among other marked areas. Through this first person account reflection on the rubric, the student was able to discuss the present assessed product.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders and staff ensure curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and deliberately integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Curricular coherence and access across grades and subjects promote college and career readiness and opportunities for a variety of learners to cognitively engage in academic tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades, unit plans are designed to include the following in-depth categories: Rationale (Big Idea, Essential Questions, Student Goals; Common Core Standards and Indicators (Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity); Skills; Mini-Lesson and Teaching Points; Guiding Question; Resources and Materials; Differentiated Instruction and Small Group Work; Fluency. Each unit plan includes a tool-kit of instructional resources for teachers, and exemplars for supporting students' development of college and career readiness skills.
- School leaders and teachers purposefully plan and revise curricular pacing calendars, using student work products and data, to include a variety of instructional considerations that afford English language learners (ELL), students with disabilities, and gifted students access to the same challenging content. For example, the following was noted in the pacing calendar for kindergarten in the month of May: Topic, "Position & Location and Shapes, Standard KG1: Consideration for ELLs: Repetition of shape name for beginners. Middle and advance students can draw and match the shapes with names. Advanced can also describe shapes by size and color; Consideration for Special Needs Children: Review shape name with these students. Place shapes of different colors and sizes in a bag/box. Have students pick a shape from the bag/box and describe it; Consideration for Advanced/Gifted: Have these students match shapes that have the same shapes, but are not in the same relative position."
- Teachers' routinely produce a rationale for revising curricula and learning tasks, logging all accounts in curriculum binders. In the reading section of the curriculum for grade 5, teachers noted, "This unit is a result of looking at student work. After looking at ways in which students interact with and respond to informational texts, we have determined that a focused content area unit is necessary.... This unit is aligned to the fifth grade science unit: food and nutrition....Children will be introduced to teacher-generated questions across Depth of Knowledge levels...." Samples of various level questions were also noted in this rationale for changing curricula and engaging tasks.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all staff and provide professional training to establish a culture for learning that systematically conveys high expectations and support for all students.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability is shared by all staff and effective feedback and support to students ensure that all students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and paraprofessionals have created professional learning communities in which they feel safe to hone professional skills associated with Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. Questioning and discussion techniques and assessment are the elements of focus in these gatherings. They shared that in their professional learning communities they forge mentor relationships and practice designing rigorous questions and assessment products, using the Depth of Knowledge Cognitive Demand Dimensions and Bloom’s Taxonomy to prepare and support their students for the next levels.
- School leaders consistently conveys high expectations, to the entire learning community, through the following: staff and parent handbooks, monthly newsletters, faculty conferences, student assemblies, family nights, parent workshops, collaboration with community-based organizations, Family Literacy Library Partnerships, differentiated teacher workshops, guidance workshop sessions, partnerships with Montefiore Clinic and Anchin Block and Anchin Partnership, and scheduled writing conferences.
- School leaders orchestrated ongoing events and created multiple opportunities to partner with alumni to foster a culture of “Striving for Excellence” in order to provide students with educational experiences that will prepare them for the next level. The school had presentations from alumni, a grade 7 student and a Harvard graduate, and routinely host career days to inspire students to think about goals beyond elementary school. The staff has also established a relationship with Lehman College to provide students with on-site college experiences.
- The staff has systematically established a culture for challenging all students to aspire to excel to institutions of higher learning. Parents expressed that they were pleased with the middle school articulation process. Grade 5 students, they explained, received on-going monitoring of academic progress and coaching with developing social skills for the transition to the middle school level. The grade 5 Career Day, they added, exposed their children to a variety of professionals, which helped them formulate aspirational life goals.