



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Judith K. Weiss

Elementary-Middle School X019

**4318 Katonah Avenue
Bronx
NY 10470**

Principal: Timothy Sullivan

Dates of review: February 12, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Maria Lopez

The School Context

Judith K. Weiss is an elementary-middle school with 504 students from grade kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 7% Black, 28% Hispanic, 60% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 8% 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 2014-15 was 95.0%.

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	Developing
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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work, and make adjustments to curricula. Distributive leadership structures are embedded in school practice.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has strengthened teacher collaboration resulting in improvements to pedagogical practices and a stronger voice in key decisions affecting supports for student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is structured and programmed so that grade and curriculum teams have time built into their weekly schedule to review data, plan, and revise lessons, and share strategies. These common preparation periods occur several times a week for each grade allowing ample time for teacher collaboration. During grade team meetings, the instructional coach trains teachers to review and analyze multiple sources of data to inform their lessons and pedagogy. Teachers use student data gathered from Fountas and Pinnell reading levels, RALLY exams, unit tests, performance assessments, and teacher-made assessments to make adjustments to their instruction.
- Teachers meet regularly in grade and content specific teams using established protocols to analyze student work and identify student needs. The vast majority of teachers are engaged in these ongoing professional reflections and collaborations, and teachers have developed a process to look at the outcomes of assessments and identify areas of academic need for groups of students. They use item analysis data to consider the following questions: “What is the challenge for students on a particular question?” and “Can this data be used to inform this year’s curriculum?” Also, teacher teams look at data on students who are “under the radar” to determine appropriate interventions.
- Distributed leadership is embedded as part of the school culture. Teacher leaders facilitate department and grade level meetings and teachers assume a leadership role in supporting colleagues through peer visitation and in instructional decisions that impact student learning. For example, the school reviewed assessment data for English language arts (ELA) and found that guided reading needed to be re-established. Additionally, increased emphasis was placed on independent reading. Teacher teams share out their work and best practices visit each other’s classrooms, conduct instructional rounds to share constructive feedback, and have a voice in key decisions involving curriculum leading professional development sessions.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide entry points into the lesson and student discussions reflect uneven levels of student understanding.

Impact

In most classrooms, inconsistency in providing multiple entry points and limited facilitation of student-led discussions diminished opportunities to promote higher order thinking and engagement, thus impeding students' active participation and demonstration of higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Although lesson plans reflected strategies for differentiated instruction, most lessons observed had the same tasks or reading materials assigned to all students. For example, in a grade 6 math class, all students worked on the same task without any differentiation. However, in a grade 8 ELA class, students while grouped during the reading lesson, all used the same reading text. In a grade 8 social studies class, students were organized in groups with differentiated tasks. One group was asked to determine the central ideas of a primary or secondary source; the second group was asked to write informative/explanatory text, and the third group was asked to focus on their use of precise language and domain/specific vocabulary.
- Teachers' use of questioning and discussion techniques varied across classrooms. In a grade 6 ELA class, students were asked to work in triads and discuss, "How are elements of mythology are present in the myth of Cronus?" However, in a grade 6 math lesson the questions were primarily recall questions with limited student discussion. The teacher asked, "How do you find the area of a parallelogram? A student responded, "The base times the length." There were no opportunities for open discussion before another question was posed
- Across classrooms observed, student engagement in high-level discussions was uneven. In a grade 6 math class, students used prior knowledge to engage in discussion in their working groups to solve the area and perimeter of a right triangle and rectangle and in a grade 6 English class, students agreed and disagreed with peers' responses and challenged each other to explain their rationale. However in a grade 8 ELA class, where students were asked to discuss with partners how, during World War II, Americans, supported the war effort at home, few students spoke and the teacher made the primary contributions to discussions.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are consistently emphasized in written curriculum for tasks across grades and subject areas for all students.

Impact

The school's purposeful curriculum decisions are building coherence and promoting cognitively engaging activities and college and career readiness for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- Across subject areas, unit plans are designed to emphasize rigorous habits and are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and include academic vocabulary, learning goals, outlined content knowledge, differentiation strategies, learning activities, resources, timelines, and assessments. For example, a grade 4 reading unit plan based on earthquakes demonstrated alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards as well as the instructional shifts focusing on using informational text to bolster understanding of a literary text. A unit plan in ELA for grade 6 focused on citing evidence to support analysis to determine the central idea of a text. To engage students in discussion and thinking about citing textual evidence and explaining how the main idea is conveyed through text details, the plan included questions such as: "How are good readers able to show comprehension through their writing?" "How do good readers and writers clearly respond to a text?" and "How do readers use annotations and jots to help monitor and show comprehension?"
- Curricula supports English language learners' (ELLs) participation in rigorous tasks such as extended writing and comprehension of informational text by inclusion of skills teaching such as annotation skills and strategies such as graphic organizers.
- Unit plans and curricula demonstrated access to all learners as evidenced by the immersion of Imagine Learning targeting ELLs for learning fluency, decoding, and comprehension skills.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and teachers utilize common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned to school curricula. Frequent checks for understanding are used to track student academic progress toward goals and inform instructional decisions.

Impact

Commons assessments and daily use of checks for understanding provide actionable feedback to teachers and students regarding student achievement. School leaders and teachers use data to monitor academic progress, determine students' areas of need and inform professional teaching practices.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers develop common assessments and task specific rubrics and use these assessment results to drive instructional adjustments as observed in the creation of differentiated groups for instruction and development of re-teach topics. Furthermore, the school uses an official assessment calendar that incorporates assessments for all subjects such as: Ready Gen unit modules, Go Math Diagnostics, science end of unit exams, project-based assessments, Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments, CMP 3 unit tests, Wilson and Foundations assessments, and teacher-designed assessments by grade.
- Teachers have developed a common grading policy that incorporates formative and summative elements aligned to the school curriculum. In addition, teachers have developed subject and genre specific rubrics such as a narrative writing rubric in alignment with the school's curricula and the Common Core Learning Standards.
- The school has identified a goal of increasing teachers' use of checks for understanding in the classroom, focusing on using strategies such as exit slips, graphic organizers, conference notes, and class share out opportunities to assess student understanding. In a grade 7 ELA class writing assignment, students used a graphic organizer to guide their literary analysis to document point of view from the book *A Long Walk to Water* as the teacher examined their graphic organizers to check the accuracy of their work. Similarly, during class visits, teachers were observed taking notes and inspecting students' work as students used graphic organizers to assess their understanding and re-orient their work as necessary.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

High expectations are consistently communicated to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and professional development opportunities. Leadership and staff offer ongoing feedback to families to support student progress towards high expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

Collaboration between all community stakeholders, a system of accountability, and ongoing communication of high expectations fosters staff support of families in communicating a clear path and understanding student progress toward achievement of college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to staff through frequent cycles of observation and feedback to teachers and has aligned professional development to elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, the principal disseminates the staff handbook that outlines the expectations around the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In addition, the school posts the daily calendar highlighting the specific Danielson indicators that will be a part of the upcoming professional learning sessions. Teachers' professional development plans are aligned with the feedback provided during classroom observations.
- The school frequently communicates with the parents distributing six report cards for elementary level students and eight report cards for middle school students yearly, as well as sending home student folders with comments and feedback from teachers every two weeks. In addition, the school distributes a parent engagement calendar that highlights a wide array of offering for parents such as a "Meet and Greet", "How to Help Your Child at Home" and "English as a Second Language Orientation". Parents and families also received information about the instructional units taught in class to ensure they understand the high demands of the Common Core Learning Stands.
- The school articulates high expectations to students via a grade 6-8 advisory program. The program advocates positive habits for teenagers with the goal of preparedness for high school. In addition, the school provides opportunities to promote college and career readiness as evidenced by the implementation of a college and career week including theme days such as, "Dress for Success", "College Spirit Day", "Decorate your Door", and "Kid-career Day", where students dress up based on the career they chose.