



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 068 Bronx

Elementary School X068

**4011 Monticello Avenue
Bronx
NY 10466**

Principal: Catherine Helfrich

**Date of review: March 24, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

P.S. 068 Bronx is an elementary school with 749 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 80% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian, and 2% other students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 17% 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 92.4%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teachers strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula.

Impact

Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts, as well as by discussions at the team and school levels. All learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Much of the professional development topics are centered on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Beginning this year, teachers have been grouped in mixed triads for collaborative intervisitations based on observations using the Danielson rubric.
- The Frayer Model (graphic organizer) is used throughout the school to support understanding of academic vocabulary. Teachers regularly use a variety of student engagement strategies to keep students motivated. One example is the “Scoot” strategy, which is an activity often used to get students up and moving around during practice with base ten numerals. During Lunch and Learns teachers engage students in games to support learning in areas of challenge, like multi-step problems. Grade 4 students in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) science class were preparing for an internet telephony conversation to be held the next day via Skype with a geologist. The lesson’s essential question was, “How do researchers form thick and thin questions before, during, and after they research?” Answers to thick questions are complex and open ended; answers to thin questions are short and close ended. The focus of the lesson was the process of erosion and how the power of wind, water, and glaciers have changed the Earth’s surface. Consistent with the school’s instructional focus on student engagement (Danielson 3c), the lesson plan began with a 15-minute “hook” in which students did an erosion experiment using Skittles candy, a paper plate, and a dropper. Students predicted what would happen when water was dropped onto a Skittle, and then connected this experiment to the process of erosion. Following a discussion of this activity, groups of students transitioned into stations to learn more about erosion using videos, computer research, and differentiated text, and developed thick and thin questions about erosion. Students used accountable talk bookmarks during their group conversations. The teachers also ensured that specific SWDs had an opportunity to discuss the difference between thick and thin questions in advance. Earlier this school year, the teachers had participated in professional development based on Dr. Marilyn Friend’s theory of co-teaching.
- The teacher of a kindergarten music class asked students, “What is the difference between a rhythm and a steady beat?” A student responded, “A beat is like this—demonstrates with his hands. Your heart can beat, but your heart can’t do rhythm.” The teacher made many references to prior learning. Teacher: “Can silence be part of rhythm?” Whole class response: “Yes, Shhhhh.”

Area of Focus

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

The majority of teacher teams are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core. Teacher teams consistently analyze student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

The instructional capacity of teachers has been strengthened through these professional collaborations. There has been improved teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of a grade 4 teacher team meeting, teachers reviewed team discussion protocols for looking at student work. Each grade has different protocols by choice. A teacher then continued the discussion begun at the last team meeting of a math performance task to determine if one of her student was challenged by the wording of the task. The teacher explained that the student understood how to use fraction strips as the models of the fractions, but when the student was asked to compute, she had difficulty. Teachers analyzed the student's work and then discussed their noticings: Teacher #1 thought that the student understood the language of the question but became confused when she added instead of subtracted. "She didn't use the CUBE strategy (Circle the numbers; Underline important words; Box the question; Eliminate unnecessary information) to break up the language," said the teacher. Teacher #2 noticed that the student was able to connect ideas but didn't use the correct mathematical operation. Teachers discussed the trend in computation across the grade: 4th grade students are still adding on their fingers; whenever there are multiple steps in a problem, students have difficulty. In response, teachers are coming up with strategies to dissect the problem, such as the CUBE strategy, however this strategy has been more successful with single-step problems.
- Teachers said that they regularly share best practices during their teacher team meetings and discuss the implications for teaching. Examples of shared practices are asking students to make lists, models, or drawings; having students act out the problem; having a lot of hands-on applications, more scaffolded questions, giving children an opportunity to explore the problem, and engaging students in a game after reteaching. Also, focusing on fluency before the math block has worked well. Some of these strategies worked well for teachers in the last math unit on factors. The team maintains its work on Google Docs so that every team member has access. Vertical teams meet regularly to identify instructional gaps. At the end of each month, the principal revisits teacher observation ratings on the Advance database to see if the scores reflect changes in teacher effectiveness.
- The school's teams have experienced recent success in decertifying from special education two children in ICT classes, and a 5th grade SWD is being mainstreamed in English language arts (ELA). State test scores have increased, with 23% of all students performing at proficiency levels 3 and 4 on the 2014 state math test compared to 20% from the prior year. Similarly, 18% of all students performed at levels 3 and 4 on the 2014 state ELA test compared to 14% from the prior year.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded coherently across grades and subjects.

Impact

There is coherence across grades and subject areas that promotes college and career readiness for all students. All learners, including ELLs and SWDs, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Pearson's ReadyGEN program for ELA and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's GO Math! program for math. Performance tasks from the New York State's EngageNY website are used to supplement these programs. The school's literacy coaches decided to incorporate a skill or strategy of the week into the ReadyGEN modules. Teachers integrate additional supplementary materials such as videos into the modules, based on the needs of their student population. The school uses the backwards design model of curriculum planning previously learned during Understanding by Design workshops sponsored by the school's network, during which teachers review the performance-based assessment and the skills needed to complete the task and master the standard. If the module takes 28 days, for example, teachers make conscious decisions to address high leverage teaching points. Curriculum maps have been revised by the school's coaches and staff developers, and were sent to teachers via email. Cluster maps reflect themes or genres and enduring understandings for activities to be conducted in writing, science, music, gym, and computer. Monthly "curriculum-at-a-glance" calendars and pacing calendars were developed by the school's professional learning teams.
- Teachers found that ReadyGEN is good for comprehension, however the reading program was not meeting their needs so they are using a guided reading program. Wilson's Foundations program is used in kindergarten through grade 2 to support fluency. Books and other materials from such publishers as Mondo and Flyleaf are also used to address such skills as decoding. Teachers said that they attempt to achieve a balance between challenging their students without frustrating them. They want students to have a deep understanding of concepts and want to employ applications that enable students to make connections with what they are learning.
- A third grade GO Math! lesson focused on solving fraction problems by using the strategy, "Drawing a Diagram." The lesson plan highlighted multiple entry points to address the needs of SWDs and students at the bottom third of performance. For example, these students were encouraged to use the CUBE strategy to guide their problem solving and to use manipulatives like fraction strips and individual white boards. The students were strategically seated in groups located in close proximity to the teacher, and were reminded of math vocabulary prior to the start of the lesson. Math sentence starters and accountable talk stems were also provided to facilitate participation in the whole-class discussion. The lesson also included a "must do" as well as a "can do" (extension) activity. It is important to note that teachers found the fraction units in GO Math! at the 3rd grade level to be weak as well as the 4th grade units on place value and rounding.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Meaningful and actionable feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students’ learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Formative assessments used by the school include unit and baseline assessments, performance-based assessments, pre-and post-instructional assessments, Fountas and Pinnell levels, and literacy profile sheets. The school uses an online data dashboard to review and analyze student performance, and inform curricular and instructional modifications.
- “Our teacher made us a chart that tracks our success,” said a student. Students reported using rubrics “...to guide us; if we don’t understand we can go to the rubric.” They also stated that they use rubrics “to self-check.” “After we see what went well (glows) and what needs to improve (grows), we give it to other kids for peer assessment.” Students working in groups in one class visited used a “Group Self-Evaluation Checklist.”
- Teachers actively take notes during instruction, capturing real-time student learning and mastery. Lesson plans reflect a variety of formative assessment strategies, including Share and Shows, math talk, student journals and reflections. For example, a grade 2 math lesson focused on student practice in telling time has the following learning target: “We can display times on analog and digital clocks in different ways.” Students were grouped based on anecdotal data and student “quick check” results from the prior lesson. As a result, three small groups were organized, including: the Green Group, comprised of students who have a strong grasp of content; the Orange Group, comprised of students who have a basic understanding of content; and the Blue Group, comprised of students who need to review content. Each group was required to peer assess another student’s responses to a question, which was differentiated to appropriately challenge and support students. At the end of the lesson, students used a rubric to reflect on the following questions: “What is something you have learned today? Why are you learning this? How do you know you’re learning?”
- Data binders are maintained by teachers, incorporating class statistics, data related to specific student mastery of skills as well as individual student goals, minutes of meetings reflecting data analysis activities, and rationales for student instructional groups. Math data sheets are used in ELA and math to capture student targets and benchmark scores from a variety of assessments. Teachers report using pre- and post-assessments to determine student mastery of standards. Student portfolios are also maintained for math, ELA, science, social studies, and writing. Portfolio pieces are required to have a task, rubric, rating, next steps for students, and evidence of self-assessment.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provides clear, focused and effective feedback and guidance supports.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations exists at this school. The school successfully partners with parents to support student progress towards high expectations. Students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Consistent with the school’s instructional focus on student engagement, the entire school has embraced the book, *Teach Like a Pirate: Increase Student Engagement, Boost Your Creativity, and Transform Your Life as an Educator* by Dave Burgess. PIRATE is an acronym for the following traits that the author says “...need to be absorbed, developed, and practiced until they become part of the teacher who is wholly committed to the profession, including Passion, Immersion, Rapport, Ask and Analyze, Transformation, and Enthusiasm.” The entire school has adopted the techniques described in the book, including providing “hooks” that focus on capturing the attention and passion of students.
- The school’s staff handbook addresses planning and preparation, the school and classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Students and staff participate in a school-wide positive behavior program called “ROAR” (Respect, Own your choices, Always be safe, and Responsibility) that reinforces actions which show good character. Students are taught the expected behaviors through direct instruction and modeling. The school’s Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) team developed a matrix of expected behavior for all aspects of the school day, including the classrooms, hallways, lunchroom, and playground. A five-point scale is used for voice modulation throughout the school, with constant reminders for students. Posted in a classroom were student writings entitled, “Mapping my way to college and career.”
- At the beginning of this school year, teachers conducted workshops for parents on student goal setting, reading strategies, and engaging students in learning with games. Parents started a Father’s Council, which they deemed an important vehicle for fathers to attract their attention, learn the school’s culture and become more involved. Recently, the fathers participating on the Father’s Council painted class numbers in the playground. A mother stated, “If there’s anything this school does well, its communication. The teachers have shared their email addresses with parents and they call parents with positive news about students. There’s an open door for communication with teachers each day from 2:15 to 2:30 pm. A parent shared that her son’s teacher came up with an action plan to address her son’s behavior. “My son was always getting good grades in 1st and 2nd grade. In 3rd grade, his grades were lower and he wasn’t used to getting low grades. He started retaliating by not doing the work. His teacher developed a “dialogue book” that tells me everything that my son does. He has improved very much.” A student said, “Teachers push us hard. One time I was having a breakdown in the class and my teacher helped me calm down and focus on my work.” Another student said, “Teachers try to challenge us harder than our level. You just have to try hard and do your best.”