



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 081 Robert J. Christen

Elementary School X081

**5550 Riverdale Avenue
Bronx
NY 10471**

Principal: Anne Kirrane

**Date of review: May 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Matthew Angell**

The School Context

P.S. 081 Robert J. Christen is an elementary school with 685 students from grade kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 9% Black, 49% Hispanic, 31% White, 8% Asian, and 3% Multi-Racial students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 14% 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 91.4%.

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	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	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	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 systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership.

Impact

Teacher team work results in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams engage in regular cycles of analysis of practice and reviewing student work with agendas created by team leaders and coaches to ensure consistency. One teacher team was observed at the end of a cycle in which they reviewed the impact of their strategies, across subgroups, after a recent assessment. Each teacher came prepared to the meeting with their student work and analysis of subgroup results. After sharing strategies that were effective throughout the unit, and identifying student groups that still struggled, the team collaborated on interventions and adjustments for future instruction as well as an assessment to measure the effectiveness of those decisions.
- The school has structures in place identify teachers for leadership positions within the school as well as structures that ensure teachers represent a meaningful position on school decisions. For instance, teachers are integral to new teacher hiring. Many teachers are hired from being student teachers through the schools collaboration with local teacher training colleges. Discussions about student teacher progress and the classroom teacher's observations are done as a committee for all hires. Teachers stated that they draw on each other's strengths within their teams to identify instructional supports for students within their subgroups. Each grade has a specialist with strategies for supporting different subgroups of students. Grade teams are entrusted to make curriculum decisions that fit their student's needs. Grade team leaders and coaches also provide teacher feedback to administrators so that all professional development is aligned with teachers' needs.
- Teachers and administrators share responsibility for improving teacher practice. On grade teams, teachers collaborate and conduct structure intervisitation based on self-identified need as well as administrator feedback. Teachers discussed, and administration confirmed, the support of struggling teachers and how they helped colleagues improve for the sake of the students and the school. In addition, the regularly scheduled professional development, school leaders work with teachers to set up lab sites based on professional development workshops teachers attended to share best practices.

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. Across classrooms teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Across classrooms teaching practices were not yet strategic in providing multiple entry points and high quality supports to engage all learners in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrating higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms teachers created structures within their lessons to ensure all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, were consistently engaged in appropriately engaging tasks. For instance, during a fourth grade writing lesson students were working in pairs to give feedback to each other and offer opportunities to add flashback sequences to their writing. The teacher facilitated the process by providing pairs with guiding questions for their conversation, rubrics to refer to when offering feedback, exemplars, and targeted conferencing with groups to aid their process. However, not all classrooms offered strategic supports. In another fourth grade classroom, students were provided guiding questions for their discussion, but they were not all aligned within the context of the lesson objective. While students were engaged in discussion the outcome of those discussions were not as focused as in other classrooms.
- Across classrooms students were engaged in rigorous discussions that promoted higher order thinking skills. For instance, during a second grade math lesson, student groups generated bar graphs from surveys they conducted on their fellow classmates and created analysis questions based on their results. Students discussed the strategies and methods as well as pushed each other's thinking on the questions they would ask of the data. In contrast, a first grade classroom was also on the topic of bar graphs and data, but the questions for student surveys were generated by the teacher and did not extend beyond a surface level understanding of the data collected.
- During a fifth grade integrated co-teaching class, of diverse learners, students participated in book club group discussions in which they analyzed how the social issues within the text exist in the relationship between primary and secondary characters. Each group had their own appropriately leveled texts and differentiated sets of questions. Groups were engaged in discussion throughout the period; however the questions in the many groups did not allow students to focus enough on specific relationships within the text which led to some generic discussions within some groups. One teacher, upon noticing many groups discussions were not progressing because of the number of secondary characters within each text, stopped the class to redirect questions back. Similar questions that led to low level discussions were observed in some classrooms.

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 Common Core Learning, content standards, and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work.

Impact

Across grades and subject areas student have access to coherent curricula that promotes college and career readiness for all students. Refinements to the curricula and academic tasks ensure that all students have access to curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging.

Supporting Evidence

- Ongoing, continuous curricula revisions across content areas ensuring all students, including low-, mid-, and higher-achievers, are regularly expected to engage in rigorous tasks. Teacher teams meet weekly to look at student work to make curricula refinements. In addition, a curriculum team meets after school to review team revisions and maintain consistency across grades. Academic tasks within each unit are aligned to baselines and pre-unit assessments according to the assessment protocols all teams must follow to ensure consistent rigor and assessment of learning.
- A review of units of study across grades and subjects revealed common template that included enduring understandings, essential questions, key standards, targeted objectives, and rigorous assessment. The curriculum team manages revisions to the curricula on Google docs so that the entire staff can collaboratively use it. The school envisions College and Career readiness as the progression of the Common Core Learning Standards that the faculty aligns vertically to ensure maximum proficiency for students entering the next level. For instance, all texts used within the curricula are identified by Lexile level so that students are engaged in sufficiently complex text throughout each grade.
- Systemic revision of curricula involves teacher leaders, coaches, and school leaders. Teams ensure all units are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts across all grades and content areas. Teams meet to revise units, coaches provide professional development connected to team needs, and school leaders provide feedback and input on curricula revisions that focus on student discourse and engagement this year.
- After reviewing Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) writing assessments in the previous school year, teachers saw a need to increase non-fiction texts, align tasks and rubrics to the demands of the Common Core Learning Standards, and improve academic vocabulary strategies across content areas. A recent unit of study in kindergarten on persuasive writing used leveled mentor texts to engage students in writing that used evidence to support their opinion. Structured supports such as graphic organizers, checklists, rubrics, and instructional strategies based on student proficiency are layered within the unit to scaffold learning.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms teachers use rubric based assessments, and checklists that all aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

Assessment practices across the vast majority of classrooms provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Common assessments are used to track progress and adjust curricular and instructional decisions so that all students demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the vast majority of classrooms, and hallway displays of student work, teachers provided students with effective rubric based feedback and next steps on all pieces of student work. Inside classrooms, student portfolios captured student progress over time in each subject and included student goals created collaboratively. Rubrics used across subjects and grades have been revised and updated both by teachers and in collaboration with students to ensure consistent feedback during the year. Students stated that they used rubrics throughout their tasks, engaged in peer feedback, and created goals connected to their progress. Teacher's comments to students to their strengths and next steps. For instance, on one student paper the teacher wrote "You clearly understand how to bring in details from more than one test, and you're able to pull relevant information. I'd like to see you grow by adding more vocabulary from the texts as well as comparative structures." Teachers use a modified rubric for lower grades to capture student progress and gives effective feedback. One student was able to explain how "three puffs" train rubric helps during classroom assignment by reminding him to use two details.
- Common assessment results are analyzed at all levels and inform teachers, and students, of progress. Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Teacher's college, Performance series, Math fluency, Foundations, science and social studies tasks are all used to create a bigger picture about student performance. Assessment protocols are embedded within the schools strategic assessment plan to ensure the accurate representation of student performance and a common understanding of each assessments role in capturing student performance. In English language arts, the school analyzed baseline data and the previous year's State tests results to identify three key standards across grades, and subgroups, that are tracked in common assessments: main Idea, author's purpose, and inference.
- Rubrics, and the process of creating rubrics, continue to be refined both by teachers and in collaboration with students. Teachers collaborated to create systems for checklists and rubrics that are early grade appropriate and embedded them within all units of study. Students also work within their classrooms, in the upper grades, to create their own rubric. Teachers have created a process by which students receive a rubric with only level 3 filled in by the teacher. Groups of students then work on different rows of the rubric to complete the levels 1, 2, and 4. Students stated they appreciated the process because it made them feel more invested in the process and they understood expectations better after the activity.

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 professional development connected to those expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicated expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

Successful partnerships with faculty and families results in a shared culture of mutual accountability for student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents recently discussed with the school the need to acknowledge and include all members of the school community. A significant number of local families speak Russian. The school leadership team, and Parent/Teacher association, collaborated to expand opportunities for all families to be included within school functions as well as provided more opportunities to acknowledge the cultural significance these families contribute. The school both provides ongoing Russian translation which encourages families to come to the school and communicate their needs. The principal also expand regular “coffee with the principal” meetings for parents to include Russian translation. “Coffee with the principal” is an open forum for parents to voice their concerns and share feedback. In addition, the school has expanded cultural acknowledgment such as with a Russian Ballet performance held within the school’s auditorium.
- Families stated that there is consistent, effective communication from the school and opportunities for parents to learn school practices so that they can practice with their children at home. Among monthly newsletters in each grade about curriculum foci in each content area, open door Tuesday afternoon policies to meet with teachers, and ongoing progress reports families stated that they could partner with their child’s teachers effectively. The school also provides workshops for parents on classroom strategies, resources to extend learning at home, and the Common Core Learning Standards. The school noticed that the attendance was not as high as they would have hoped for in some workshops and now workshops are held on Saturday as well as during the week to ensure all parents have an opportunity to participate.
- School faculty conducts extensive professional development connected to Danielson’s Framework for Teaching to establish a shared understanding of best practice. On Monday, school leaders share classroom observation data from across the school that has been identified by grade leaders, coaches, and school administrators. During walkthroughs and observations, low inference evidence is gathered about the room environment as well as instruction which is connected to the shared belief that room environment is equally important in student engagement. Teachers and coaches also collaborate with administrators in designing professional development opportunities connected to these shared noticing including mentorships, pairing of teachers, intervisitation, and choice of facilitators for each professional development session.