



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Sidney Silverstein Little Sparrow School

Elementary School X088

**1340 Sheridan Avenue
Bronx
New York 10456**

Principal: Melinda Hyer

Date of review: February 12, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Tammy Pate

The School Context

The Sidney Silverstein Little Sparrow School is an elementary school with 202 students from kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 31% Black, 68% Hispanic, 0% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.0%.

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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff, and effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

Consistent high expectations and training has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability for those expectations and successfully partner with families to support student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders shared that an extensive process to calibrate their observation lens has resulted in the creation of school-wide instructional norms that all teachers contribute to and assess. One example of this calibration can be observed in Advance teacher observation reports and teacher intervisitation logs. In both examples, administrator and teachers observation lens highlight similar “look-fors” and administrator feedback is so aligned that teachers communicate that it does not matter who observes them because they know the feedback and recommendations always align to the Danielson Framework.
- The school shared that expectations connected to getting students to be college and career ready are communicated to parents in the following ways: parent/teacher conferences, promotion in doubt meetings with teachers, individual education plan (IEP) meetings, written communications such as reading level letters, and conference requests. Student goals and expectations are explained to parents at PTA meetings. Numerous opportunities are extended to families to participate and lead in setting learning goals for their children. Parent meet frequently to review school goals and expectations, the Common Core Learning Standards, reading levels, literacy and math curriculum and NYS exams.
- Parent partnerships are valued and actively sought after at the Sidney Silverstein Little Sparrow School. Conversations and observation of parent interactions revealed strong collaboration with many parents participating in classroom instruction, lunch duty, academic planning workshops and school culture building activities.
- Students are taught and can communicate what, why and how they are learning something. The school shared that every student writes a letter to their future teacher explaining what they have learned during the current school year and they set their goals for the following school year. During a meeting with students, all were able to communicate what they were learning, how they learned best, and how this learning would help them in the future. This was consistent for every child including English language learners (ELLs) and students with special needs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks but are not yet embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects so that curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills and are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Common Core aligned curricula which integrates the instructional shifts are in place to support the learning needs of all students. Diverse learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of the current English Language Arts (ELA) and math curriculum demonstrate the school's steps to align their curriculum to Common Core Learning Standards, including a vertically aligned CCLS-based units for literacy, implementation of GoMath as recommended by the department, the use of Universal Design for Learning as the source for differentiation strategies, and the use of Webb's Depth of Knowledge and Hess' Matrix of Cognitive Rigor as the basis for developing rigorous questions and unit outcomes/tasks. The school also provides professional development on Dweck's Mindsets to encourage teachers and students in understanding the impact of a growth mindset on achievement. The school acknowledges that this work has yet to be vetted by any external source and intends to leverage their network to continue to inform the work they doing to create a rigorous responsive curriculum for their students.
- The school has worked with their network to revise their curriculum which includes a school-wide common language for rubrics and triangulation of the Common Core, checklists and rubrics, and teacher-created curriculum units. These units include differentiated texts based on Lexile levels and the special learning needs of English language learners and students with special needs. All students use the school's common rubric which includes four steps 1 means "I attempted", 2 means "I was inconsistent", 3 means "I was consistent", and 4 means "I was skillful". Students and teachers use this language to self and peer assess and it is incorporated into planned checks for understanding in lesson plans. The school continues to embed this practice across all grades and content areas.
- The school's instructional focus includes developing common assessments in writing (rubrics and checklists) to support literacy progress with an emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills. Teams have worked together to revise discussion rubrics to support student discussion and language development through the use of questioning. An example of this was observed in teacher unit plans and on student work products that both emphasized the use of high frequency words and transition words as a way to make student discussions more accountable and to require a higher thinking demand. Transition word charts and accountable-talk conversation guides were affixed to student desks and work folders.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula.

Impact

All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- According to the School Self Evaluation Form the school-wide instructional focus is to develop common assessments in writing, including rubrics and checklists, to support literacy progress with an emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills. An example of this practice was observed in a 3rd grade math class. Students were grouped based on the results of a previous unit test. Students also sat in groups based on their language proficiency. Two groups work independently and one group worked with the teacher. In the group working with the teacher, students were asked to identify the steps to solving a number sentence. After presenting their steps, the teacher then asked them to have a conversation with each other about their individual process. When asked, one student stated in Spanish that she was helping her classmate to translate his word problem solution into English. She continued, "He helps me with my math problems and I help him with his English."
- The school's instructional focus includes as emphasis on discussion as a form of assessment. They further stated that they promote high levels of student thinking and participation through questioning and discussion practices such as turn and talks, think-pair-share, and discussion circles or groups. During a visit to a second grade English as a second language classroom, students were observed using question cards that spanned five levels of complexity. In most classrooms there were a minimum of four groups, often each group worked on a different activity connected to the lesson objective. Upon inquiry, students were able to communicate why they were in their particular group such as learning style, language proficiency or results on a recent test. They challenged each other. One student said, "I try to ask the hardest questions because it makes us think harder and that makes us smarter." She spoke with obvious pride in herself.
- Teachers work with the school's English language learner teacher to craft appropriately challenging tasks for all students including those in bilingual classes. In a second grade reading class, a group of five students were observed sitting in a tent in the classroom. When asked what they were doing the students held up Spanish and English language versions of the same book. They stated that they were reading and then would test each other's understanding using their question baggies. Another group of students were standing around the word wall reading their introductory paragraphs to each other. They then each picked a more advanced word from the word wall to replace a simple word used in their writing. They laughed and high-fived each other when they identified a word to improve. The teacher circulated and provided support only when necessary.

Findings

The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, track progress, and adjust curricular and instructional decisions and across the vast majority of classrooms. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

All students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery and teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs. Students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers utilize a school-wide tracking system for student performance throughout a unit. Assessments from the GoMath curriculum allow for students to complete their work and reach achievement goals. Across classrooms, teachers collect data from assessments to make adjustments to their instructional practices based on levels of student mastery. The school uses a Fist to Five Protocol as a nonverbal assessment tool. A closed fist means, "I don't understand." A close fist with one finger up means, "I need help." Two fingers in the air means, "I could use more practice." Three fingers in the air means, "I understand pretty well." Four fingers in the air means, "I mostly understand." Five fingers in the air means, "I completely understand the text and I can explain it to someone else."
- To promote school-wide coherence, teacher teams meet weekly to discuss student performance for all students and make revisions to assessment practices as necessary. Teachers grade tasks and assessments, analyze data, and then adjust their instruction based on new evidence. Evidence of this was observed in the school's data analysis structures. Teams agree upon standards to be assessed based on previous year summative assessments. Measures of Student Learning results and unit tests show an increase in individual and groups of students' performance year to year.
- Classroom observations revealed students self-assessing and peer-reviewing each other's work. Students prompted each other to explain their thinking and offered each other feedback on how to meet higher levels on the rubric's criteria. Lesson plans and activities consistently evidenced the use of multiple forms of checks for understanding with the majority of these checks occurring amongst peers. Questioning is scaffolded and tiered for groups of learners. Teachers use graphic organizers for students to record their thinking.
- Teachers make instructional adjustments based on student learning needs as evidenced by a wide variety of formative assessments. School-wide student self-assessment practices promote metacognition and encourage students to monitor their own learning paths. The vast majority of classrooms used a variety of formative assessment strategies such as "turn-and-talks" where teachers listened to assess student discussions regarding key ideas. The "Traffic Light" informal assessment strategy allowed for student to assess their level of skill mastery and explain their rationale for giving themselves a rating. Teachers use these techniques to set instructional goals and modify their plans to tailor instruction to individual student learning needs.

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 for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership.

Impact

As a result, teachers have a strong voice and play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. Teacher practice has improved so that mastery of goals for groups of students is readily observed.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers engage in classroom intervisitations with a focus on learning mathematical practices. Teachers discussed previous lesson studies and the revisions they made to their instruction as a result of their visits and professional conversations. During an observed meeting, teachers discussed their visits to colleague classrooms. The conversations revolved around ways to maintain cohesive instructional practices, while adapting instruction to meet specific student learning needs. As one teacher indicated, “My students will need visual and verbal cues since they struggle with the command of the language.”
- At team meetings, teachers created checklists to gauge student mastery of targeted skills and revised checklist criteria and indicators. Adjustments to assessment practices such as rubrics were established. Grade level planning is a regularly scheduled event that occurs weekly. These meetings include activities such as analyzing assessments, planning instruction, and reviewing curriculum. The teams also include members responsible for summer curriculum writing and weekly professional development facilitation.
- Teachers were observed engaging in inquiry-based conversations as they analyzed student work products. As teachers conducted inquiry work, conversations were focused on how students performed when they were provided with multiple forms of assessment tools. Teachers made modifications to the existing menu of student-friendly rubrics based on student performance. An example of this work was observed during a teacher team meeting where the school’s “I Can” non-fiction writing rubric was revised. After looking at several students’ work, teachers realized that the rubric did not allow students to rigorously assess their use of non-fiction resources. They replaced, “I CAN explain my opinion” with “I CAN defend my position using evidence from the text”.
- Teacher-led common planning where teachers work on the literacy and math curriculum, lesson planning, assessment data is analyzed and used to drive instruction, looking at student work, and turn-keying of information received at professional development. Teachers also lead professional development including SIOP, Mastery Connect, and vocabulary activities. Teachers shared that they feel empowered in selecting professional development opportunities based on their individual needs and they appreciate the fact that they always have the opportunity to facilitate for their fellow teachers. This has resulted in more cohesive instruction across grade levels and supports distributive leadership.