



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Herman Ridder Intermediate School 98**

**Junior High-Intermediate-Middle X098**

**1619 Boston Rd.  
Bronx  
NY 11238**

**Principal: Mark Turcotte**

**Date of review: March 9, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Jorge A. Estrella**

## The School Context

Herman Ridder is an Intermediate School with 256 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 29% Black, 67% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Asian students and 1% native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students. The student body includes 26% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.6%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all staff using Danielson's Framework for Teaching. The school offers ongoing feedback to families through a variety of venues to keep them updated of student progress.

### Impact

The principal established systems and structures that hold staff accountable to the school's high expectations. As a result, staff, parents and students have a common understanding of school-wide expectations that promote parents understandings to the expectations that connect to a route of college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to staff through sharing the instructional non-negotiables, and through developing a shared understanding of instructional rigor, ongoing weekly principal bulletins, and frequent cycles of observation and feedback to teachers. For example, the feedback provided to teachers is actionable, and next steps targeted and are time bound, so that teachers are held accountable for their professional growth.
- All teachers are engaged in ongoing collaborations such as a grade level and subject level meetings in which teachers assume accountability for meeting established expectations. Professional development is provided to teachers to support them in meeting the school's expectations for professional growth. For example, teachers participated in a workshop to define protocols to conduct professional meetings during common planning time.
- The professional learning plan reflects sessions on the Danielson Framework for Teaching based on an analysis of Advance data and provides staff with instructional expectations. For example, listed within the plan are professional development sessions around the instructional focus of Evidence in Argument with an emphasis on Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques to promote developing the skill set necessary for college and career readiness which is consistent with the instructional plan.
- Parents shared that they are in contact with the instructional team regarding their child's progress through on-going communications with families using different venues, phone calls, 1:1 conferences, workshops. They are also provided with support in understanding the school's expectations for their children through opportunities such as parent orientation sessions, ARIS link training, health fairs. Additionally, there are workshops for parents such as Zumba classes, Computer/ESL classes and family game night.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Teaching practice is beginning to reflect coherence around a set of beliefs regarding how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teacher practice across classrooms inconsistently provides all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) with opportunities to engage in rich discussions and produce meaningful work products.

### Impact

Effective teaching strategies are uneven across most classrooms. Consequently, all students, including SWD's and ELLS are not yet receiving the level of instruction that is consistently cognitively challenging and promotes high levels of student engagement.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, some lessons followed a consistent model, providing students with a Learning Target, Do Now, Mini- Lesson, Guided Practice and Independent or Group Practice. However, there was limited evidence of coherence in the integration of the instructional shift across grade levels and content areas. For example, in a lesson in English language arts, students were engaged in independent or group practice, and students were asked to cite textual evidence to support their thinking. In a math class, students were given opportunities to demonstrate their thinking to determine the area of a trapezoid and justify their answers. However, in one English language arts class, the teacher was observed leading the students in a full class discussion and critique of grammatical errors in student work, with limited connection to the topic or learning target.
- Across classrooms, some students were engaged in peer–peer discussion and some classes, in full class discussion, the pattern of teacher to student interaction was teacher-student- teacher, limiting student ownership of the discourse. For example, in English as a second language and a 6<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics classes, students were observed in peer-peer discourse. However, in an English language arts class, students were observed calling out, speaking in disrespectful ways to one another. Additionally, in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade science class, although students were seated in groups, they were not engaged in accountable talk.
- Principal indicated that the instructional focus of the school is Evidence in Argument where students will develop the skill of using evidence to support arguments in discussion, which will then transfer to stronger writing. The implementation of this strategy is inconstant across the classrooms. For example, in special education English language arts and English as a second language classes, students were engaged in meaningful interactions that promote higher order thinking skills. However, in a social studies class, students were using a Venn diagram to identify similarities and differences between Christianity and Judaism, and most of the students were working independently copying statements from the diagram to their working sheet and were unable to articulate the purpose of the task.
- While some teachers use questioning techniques that engage students in accountable talk resulting in meaningful student work products, most teachers still execute teacher-directed lessons giving students minimal opportunity to engage in independent work.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills inconsistently across grades, subjects, and /or for English language learners and special education students.

### Impact

The revisions of the curricula are beginning to assist teachers with lesson planning by supporting the decisions they make around ways to differentiate activities and the types of independent and small group work they develop to engage their students.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders worked collaboratively with teachers during common planning times to develop a set of instructional beliefs about how their middle school students learn best. Teacher teams are developing curricula aligned with the Common Core for the core content areas. For example, the instructional team has selected Expeditionary Learning for English language arts and Connected mathematics project 3 and is beginning to build coherence in the grade 6 through 8 continuums to create rigorous performance tasks aligned with Common Core Learning. Some teacher units and lesson plans provide evidence of planning in building student skill to engage in rigorous tasks for all learners. For example, the English language arts and mathematics curriculum units of study are aligned to the Common Core Standards. However, there is inconsistency in planning for the integration of the instructional shift in other subject areas.
- Across grades and subject areas teachers use curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and they are in the process of refining curricula to meet the needs of all students. However, curricula maps, unit plans or lesson plans are yet to demonstrate how to develop rigorous academic tasks that are accessible to all learners, including English language learners and special education students.
- Some teachers plan lessons that provide a high level of rigor across classes to ensure that higher-order skills are emphasized; however this is inconsistent across grades and content areas. For example, in the English as a second language lesson, the teacher posed questions that promote higher-order thinking skills by having students analyze genetically modified organisms. In an English class, the teacher posed low-level questions that did not promote proper interaction among students.
- The process of curricula and tasks being refined based on the outcome of looking at data and student work for a diversity of learners was inconsistent. Although tasks were being aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and identified Web's Depth of Knowledge, the 6th grade mathematics lesson plan and the English 7<sup>th</sup> grade lesson plan, showed a lack of supports for special education students and English language learners, as well as extensions for high performing students.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers use or create common assessments and rubrics, and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula, and use the resulting data from student work analysis to provide feedback to teachers and students regarding student achievement and to adjust curricula and instruction. However, formative assessments do not always provide a clear portrait of student mastery, hindering the development of effective instructional adjustments in some classes.

### **Impact**

Use of assessments that are not always fully aligned to standards hinders teacher and students' accurate understanding of progress toward achievement. Therefore, teachers inconsistently identify all learners' common learning challenges and students are not fully aware of their next learning steps.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders ensure an alignment of teacher task development, rubrics/evaluation tools, and authentic/actionable feedback to students from teachers through frequent and focused observation utilizing a teaching framework/rubric, authentic/actionable feedback to teachers, and differentiated professional development. For example, teachers are beginning to develop common assessments and task specific rubrics to drive instructional adjustments, and use the results to drive support for individual student needs.
- The feedback provided to students is inconsistent across classrooms. For example some work displayed on bulletin boards indicates specific, actionable feedback to students and others did not offer feedback. For example, students shared that they used rubrics in English language arts and social studies but not in mathematics and science. This was confirmed after reviewing student work provided by students.
- In most classrooms visited, teachers circulate around the classroom, observe students, and provide verbal feedback to some students as a check for understanding. The practice of annotating students' strengths and areas for improvement and adjusting the lesson based on notes recorded was not observed consistently across classes. For example, the special education English teacher has a system to record students' responses in her Ipad but this practice was not evident in other classes visited. In addition, teachers were not able to articulate how they annotate students' strengths and areas for improvement, as part of their regular teaching practice.
- The principal indicated that teachers integrate exit slips as part of formative assessments into their lesson planning. However, most lessons observed did not include time for an exit slip and it was not evident that teachers use this information to make adjustments to instruction and address learning gaps.
- Students could not articulate the rationales for the school grading policy or for the protocols established in the schools for different types of assessments. Students could not articulate their mastery levels in different content areas or their next steps to meet the standards. In addition, students stated that the work is reviewed by the teachers, but there are limited opportunities for students to self-assess their work.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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**Findings**

The majority of teachers engage in content area professional collaborations that promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards, instructional shifts and alignment of practice to the school’s instructional goals. A distributive leadership is emerging, where teachers co-facilitate team meetings and are engaged in key decisions regarding student learning.

**Impact**

Teacher team collaboration is working to define protocols for instructional coherence, allowing for the sharing of best practices and the promoting of curriculum alignment. The work of teacher teams is aiming to improve teacher capacity and student learning outcomes. As a result, this beginning stage is compromising key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The principal is in the process of identifying and developing instructional leads. The leadership has been involved offering professional learning sessions to the faculty to build capacity around effective practices for teacher teams. The implementation of this process is in its emerging stage, as it was evident in the teachers’ team meeting observed.
- The majority of the teachers meet regularly in content specific Inquiry teams. However, the inquiry approach is in the initial stages as teachers are beginning to analyze assessment data, identify student need and inform goals for students. For example, the English language arts team was observed utilizing a tuning protocol to reflect on shared practice in questioning and discussion techniques. Members of this team shared that they are in the beginning stages of analyzing student work and outcomes to inform next shared instructional steps.
- Leadership developed systems and structures that allow for Flexible Child Study Team meetings scheduled during the regular school day, deliberately designed to result in development of interventions and supports for students identified by teacher teams and Pupil Personnel Committee as “at-risk.” However, the information recorded in the tracking system does not provide details of the specific needs of the students. For example, the recommendations and/or innervations for implementations mostly focus on social-emotional interventions but very general on interventions to improve instruction such as, intervention in mathematics or English.
- Teachers reported that they are encouraged to take on leadership roles in the school. Teacher leaders take turns in leading and developing agendas for meetings to ensure the time they spend together is productive and connected with their goals. Teachers explained that the meetings were structured by the administration, but that they released this responsibility to teachers, and they in turn keep notes and agendas that are shared with the leadership team after the collaborative sessions.