



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 121 Throop

Elementary School X121

**2750 Throop Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469**

I.A. Principal: Gloria Martinez

**Date of review: May 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

The School Context

Throop is an elementary school with 992 students from grade pre-Kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 63% Black, 27% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island 6% students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations where distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

These collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards, strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers who have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in grade teams to look at student work while using an agreed-upon protocol. Through the use of coaches and consultants, staff stated that they have become better at looking at student work to determine next steps in curricula adjustments and instruction. At the team meeting, teachers followed the protocol for looking at student work and using the math practices rubrics. Last time they met they had noted the rubric needed to focus more on the math practices so the meeting's goal was "to focus on their noticings of student work and the give the teacher what she needs to strengthen her practices and our expectations of the rubric". Teachers agreed that this is the protocol employed weekly.
- Teachers stated that they share the leadership roles including each doing different parts such as create agendas, take notes, compile the resources, take attendance and to upload all files to Dropbox, a cloud-based repository being used for team records. This new archive system has become a school wide practice. In a school wide effort to strengthen teams in teaching and improving math scores, the principal stated and teachers concurred, "Teams of grade level teachers plan math lessons in which they observe each other implementing the lesson and then provide feedback." In this math inquiry professional learning, teachers follow the cycle through five phases of ask, investigate, create, discuss, and reflect. Professional development has supported this cycle of inquiry. Teachers have completed a cycle on implementing talk moves in English language arts. They focused on a targeted group of students, determining a method of monitoring for successes and defining the evidence collected. Additionally they collected similar evidence on areas of challenge and evidence and directly linked it with the use of Talk Moves in class. This data has since supported their next steps which informed professional development.
- Teachers look at student work and data. One type of common data that they analyze is data from the computer program JiJi, which is a spatial temporal math software being used across the school. Teachers agreed that they all analyze the data to determine flexible groupings based on student achievement in JiJi. Teachers determine a standard or part of a standard that some students did not achieve at a specified level and select a small group of students who missed the same component of the standard, design a specific mini-lesson and pull them out of the ordinary groups and work with them until they achieve at the agreed upon level. Teachers agreed that this is the cycle that they all use, whether the data comes from JiJi or a common assessment from their curricula.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies including questioning and scaffolds inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, student work products and discussions.

Impact

Uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products, including the work of English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- There were classes with differentiation and scaffolds and others without these supports for student learning. In a first grade ELL Special Education teacher support services (SETTS) class, the task was too rigorous for some who were frustrated and unable to start while there were some who completed the task in under a minute and then had no extension provided. Although students had snap cubes, 99 chart and number line on desk, these were not sufficient for some students. Additionally directions were spoken and not written for reference. Similarly in a second grade Gifted and Talented science class, all students had two cups with waxworms and mealworms. Each had a Venn diagram to complete a comparison/contrast of the two types of worms. Yet, were no extensions provided for this Gifted and Talented class, early finishers were left unchallenged. In a kindergarten class after the teacher modeled how to retell part of a story, students moved into differentiated groups for reinforcement of skills on questioning, word recognition, questioning, and sequencing.
- Questioning ranged from Depth of Knowledge (DOK) 1-3 questions, with most in the 1-2 range. In a second grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) math class, students worked with cereal and grid paper to make arrays, in tiered groups. As one teacher worked with the cereal and grid to make an equal array, equal number of items in each row and column, she asked, "What would we do to make this an equal array?" and "What do you mean about that?" A student answered and the teachers worked to get more student participation. Yet in a kindergarten class where students had pennies and chart, the teacher posed several high-level questions that prompted students to self-guide through the pennies investigation, such as "How do you know that is ten?", "How will I know?" and "What strategies could I use?"
- Student discussion ranged from teacher-directed to single students using talk moves, such as sharing a partner's statements or using accountable talk stems. In a third grade Gifted and Talented math class, students shared out their exit tickets about the shapes and how they are similar and different. However, no discussion ensued as the teacher asked the exit ticket questions to students and it remained in a teacher-to-student-to-teacher back and forth without student-to-student discussion. In a fifth grade class, students worked on a writing piece and the teacher tried several times to bring students into a conversation about a writing sample about a weather event. Students had opportunities for turn-and-talks, and when the teacher posed questions, individual students answered but it did not result in a conversation, nor were all students engaged. Yet in a third grade ICT class, students shared in a turn-and-talk and were able to cite text-based evidence from *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie, to describe character traits and students could share their partners' statements.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

School leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students so that a diversity of learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula demonstrates the use of agreed-upon lesson plan templates and/or components including differentiation, assessment, and questioning. Teachers have created a curricula from a compilation of the Georgia State Department of Education units, Expeditionary Learning, Engage New York, and have supplemented with blended learning components from JiJi, spatial-temporal math computerized software program. Teachers maintain their curricula on Dropbox, a cloud-based site where teachers, coaches, and administrators store the school's curricula available for revisions, comments, and transparent communication and archive. With math as a focus this year, teachers, with the support of coaches and outside consultants created a school wide math handbook to delineate the coherent implementation of the math program and using data to drive instruction.
- Teachers meet to ensure that the curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and have integrated the instructional shifts. For example, the instructional shifts in math concepts are intentionally delineated in each lesson and unit. Additionally teachers have employed the Understanding by Design method of planning curricula, and this is evident in lessons, units, and scope and sequence. Each shows the assessment to be used. Additionally the math handbook delineates the cognitively guided instructional model used by the school so that there is coherence in the implementation.
- The school believes that students learn best when they are involved, have clear learning targets and within a balanced approach to literacy and math incorporating small differentiated groups. To this end and to make the Common Core Learning Standards more student-friendly, the school has adopted the "I Can Common Core" statements, employing them in their lessons and units as well as listing them for student use. Teachers have also adopted a focused method to engage students in their own learning through clear learning targets and two lenses, "We are learning to" (WALT) and "What I'm looking for" (WILF). Each WALT and WILF are listed in lesson plans and posted for student use. When asked, students stated that these help them to focus on the lesson.
- The school's instructional focus includes questioning and discussion as well as differentiation and teachers ensure that within the pacing calendars differentiated tasks and homework for tiered groups of students is provided.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and they use these common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

These assessments and rubrics provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and the results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams have developed formative assessment lessons (FAL) in conjunction with the Georgia State curriculum that they have adopted. These FAL help teachers to determine students' depth of knowledge and monitor their progress toward unit goals as well as to plan next steps in student learning. The rubric created lists the Common Core standard and instructional shifts math practice is aligned to each component of the task, which has an allotted amount of points per component. At the end is a tally that correlates to the levels of 1-4 and novice-expert. The rubrics are based on the Exemplars math rubrics with levels at novice, apprentice, practitioner, and expert. Teachers created tiered work for students based on the results of these assessments to bring students closer to the goal of mastery. Students are familiar with these levels and know where they are in their current math unit. Goals are kept in different places in different classes, with many taped to the desk. For example in a second grade class one student's goals are, "In reading I am working on reading comprehension and retelling with details. In math I am working on identifying even and odd numbers in a group of objects. In writing I am working on focusing my topic and strengthening my writing by revising and editing." Teachers use the instructional shifts to complete these rubrics and work to ensure that students are mastering the Common Core.
- Teachers use Fountas and Pinnell to determine baseline for students in English language arts and also throughout the year to determine growth towards goals. In special education classes, teachers also use the Fountas and Pinnell intervention word study and ready strategies for comprehension. Students know their reading levels and were able to speak toward their reading level goals. The lower grades and special education teachers use the early childhood assessment in math (ECAM) as a common assessment in math. Teachers agreed when one explained the process used for special education, is what many modify and use in individual classes across the school, "We determine guided focused areas from ECAM on Fridays and take a lesson from the Georgia map and tailor it to our students and make tiered groups and tasks and modify based on their needs."
- Student work observed on bulletin boards in hallways and classrooms, in student folders and portfolios showed feedback is actionable, including next steps. For example, students receive rubric-based feedback such as "you added accurate details" in on-demand response writing, and feedback on a first grade essay stated, "Use charts in the room to help you spell words from the book. Great job using the words, 'for example'." Further, students know their level on JiJi as progress charts hang in classrooms. In many classes, teachers track students' results from daily activities, with the Common Core standard heading columns, teachers note the level of student work and specific areas to improve within the standard. Many teachers prepare reading focus sheets for small group work in grades 3-5 to preplan vocabulary preview, vowel patterns, and identifying genre and next steps instructionally.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching to the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

School leaders provide training and have a system of accountability for those expectations. Staff and school leaders offer ongoing feedback to help families understand student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The professional development committee created a teacher survey regarding their needs for professional development. From these results, the committee developed the professional development plan for each half of the school year, using detailed questions. For example, “What do you feel is your biggest challenge while teaching writing?” Teachers were asked to rank a list of six tasks in teaching writing in order of difficulty. Such specificity enabled the team to create professional development geared to the staff’s reported needs.
- Teachers have class webpages that parent’s access to determine homework, assignments, class trips, and news. Parents stated that they visit these websites weekly. Parents also stated that they are in constant communication with the teachers, who send emails, update their websites, weekly red folders, and call home. Parents stated that there is an open-door policy at the school with administration and teachers are always ready to speak with parents to support students. Parents spoke about the faculty working vertically to ensure that each class connects with the previous and the next and this supports student learning of the Common Core Learning Standards that will help them in middle school, high school, and college. Parents also spoke to their child’s goals in class and how these are also discussed at the parent/teacher conferences and in the progress reports, all of which they are glad to receive such feedback. In regard to the goals, parents also spoke about the independent reading logs and math website, for JiJi, and how they support their children in reaching these goals. Additionally parents spoke about going to the middle school fair as both fourth and fifth grade parents to support their child’s selection of middle school and attending middle school open house events. Further, parents spoke of the many different workshops provided including those on math, English language arts and science test preparation by grade levels, academic success, and understanding assessments.
- Administration sends weekly memos to describe the expectations for all staff members. For example, one such memo focuses on the expectations for special education (SETTS) and general education teachers for reading, writing, math, and goal setting. It explains in detail the literacy and math mini-lessons should be done before the SETTS teacher joins the math block and so the SETTS teachers can begin when students break into smaller groups. Others speak to professionalism, plan-books and planning, observations, consultants, class website upkeep, grade team meetings, commendations and recommendations from superintendent visit, progress reports, and student assessment files in assessment crates.