Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

James M. Kieran

Middle School X123

1025 Morrison Avenue
Bronx
NY 10472

Principal: Richard Hallenbeck Jr.

Date of review: May 22, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Karen Ames

The School Context

James M. Kieran is a middle school with 417 students from grade 6 through grade 8 The school population comprises 21% Black, 75% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 28% 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 88.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**
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**	**Developing**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Proficient**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders have established a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff and families.

Impact
There is a highly supportive learning environment where school leaders share and communicate high expectations for professional growth for teachers and college and career readiness for students.

Supporting Evidence

- Ongoing feedback to families to understand their children's academic and social progress is consistently made via phone calls, newsletters, emails, and text messages. This was confirmed during the parent meeting, as parents expressed that school leaders and teachers provide ongoing communication via newsletters, phone messages, and emails. Parents also shared that all school leaders have open door policies to discuss any school related matters.

- School leaders have secured a school-wide interactive online grading system, Teacher Ease, to communicate with parents about their children's academic and social progress. Here, parents and teachers get the opportunities to review and discuss students' strengths and next steps. During the parent meeting, parents expressed how useful and meaningful Teacher Ease is in terms of understanding where their children were in making progress or needing additional supports.

- At the beginning of the school year, school leaders provide a professional handbook for all staff that outlines clear expectations and professional duties. The staff handbook also includes the school's mission, lesson planning guidelines, grading policies, and the effective use of professional preparation periods.

- School leaders provided staff with a 2014-2015 Professional Development Plan that is designed to address the professional learning needs of staff. The plan also includes the four domains of the Danielson Framework For teaching as well as content specific learning opportunities to help strengthen pedagogical practices across the school. In addition, school leaders communicate high expectations to staff through cycles of classroom observations informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and followed by meaningful feedback.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching strategies and scaffolds inconsistently provided multiple entry points into the lesson and student discussion reflected uneven levels of student participation.

Impact
Across classrooms, the missed opportunities to consistently engage all learners in challenging tasks and higher order thinking hinder students from exhibiting work at high levels.

Supporting Evidence

- Evidence of higher order questions and cognitive tasks were noted in some classrooms. Students in a grade 8 English language arts (ELA) class listened to the lyrics of the song, *Patches* by Clarence Carter and examined the lyrics. Students then discussed in partnerships the following question: "Do you think it was fair for Patches' father to leave him with the responsibility he did at such a tender age?" Students then argued their perspectives of Patches' father's final words. However, in other classes there were low-level recall type questions. Grade 6 class questions included, "Who is the main character?" "Who can define the word conflict?" What does this mean?" In a grade 7 math class students were asked to draw a triangle given angles and side lengths.

- In some classes, instructional practice allowed for multiple entry points such as visuals, process charts, paraprofessionals, and teachers working with small groups, or one-on-one with students. This year the school is transitioning into a new curriculum and teachers have initiated a system for grouping students according to needs. However, in some classes the grouping of students was not deliberate in order to assign leveled tasks as supportive strategies to assist students in achieving specific grade-level outcomes according to their needs. For example, in grade 6 ELA Integrated collaborative teaching class students were grouped based on their reading proficiency levels, while in another class, a grade 7 ELA class, the teacher conducted a whole class lesson.

- While in some classes there were some opportunities for students to turn and talk, across classes, lessons were largely teacher dominated with teachers calling on individual students. Thus, there were missed opportunities for all students to engage in individual, partner, or small group discussions, and to be fully engaged during the lesson and be able to demonstrate high levels of thinking.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing

Findings
School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Academic tasks are not systematically planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
Although there is some modification of curricula to align student needs, supports are not consistently tailored to meet the needs of specific student subgroups. Therefore, not all students are consistently challenged with high-level tasks pushing their thinking, and promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is transitioning from using Code X to utilizing Expeditionary Learning for their literacy program. Throughout March and April, teachers have received professional development in the components of balanced literacy which provides students choices while improving their reading and writing skills. Teachers have made some adjustments to the curricula by evaluating the independent reading materials in the classrooms. In terms of writing, the school has begun to incorporate the Teacher's College Writing curriculum providing each student with response journals. For example, a grade 6 literacy unit was amplified to include cause and effect relationships and added key questions to allow students to look deeper into the text and relate the text to another they had read. However, the practice of informing curricular decisions from all learners through the in-depth analysis of data and student work is not a systematic practice.

- Although curriculum documents are structured to reflect the Common Core Standards, academic tasks do not always lead to higher order thinking. For example, in the grades 6 and grade 7 literacy curricula there are many instances of compare and contrast with few opportunities to analyze and synthesize.

- In reviewing units of study, some planning reflects grouping students using the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) data and creating tiered intervention groups for low performing students and book clubs for high performing students. A review of lesson plans revealed that targeted supports for students who struggle are not always specific nor are they consistently seen across subject areas. For example, lesson plans contained few indications for how students with disabilities and English language learners are supported according to specific needs to engage in rigorous, challenging academic tasks.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings
The school is emerging in its use of common assessments, grading policies, task specific rubrics, and checks for understanding, to effectively measure students' progress and make instructional adjustments.

Impact
Lack of common school wide assessments across all subjects and the inconsistencies of checking for understanding and meaningful feedback have resulted in students not being fully clear on their next learning and instructional steps.

Supporting Evidence

- While school leaders and teachers across the grades and subjects have created content rubrics and grading policies that are aligned to the curricula, there is very limited meaningful feedback and next steps for students' relative to their work products. While some classes visited had students' work samples that were provided with meaningful feedback related to the different content rubrics, the vast majority of students' work samples were not provided specific feedback referenced to content rubrics. Several reviewed work samples included comments from teachers that stated, "Good" or "Excellent".

- During the meeting with the principal, it was shared that the school is still in the process of obtaining school wide common assessments across the three grades that can be used to better determined students' progress and academic performance. During a teacher team meeting, teachers shared that they are beginning to look for common assessments across content areas that they can use to help them better assess and track students' progress in all subjects.

- During the classroom visits, there was no evidence of checking for understanding during the lessons to assess students' understanding. During the meeting with school leaders, it was expressed that the school is still gathering suggestions and ideas on the best ways to fully assess students' understanding during lessons. School leaders and teachers are beginning to look at various questioning strategies that can be incorporated into the lessons to inform teachers of students' understanding during the lesson. In addition, school leaders shared that exit slips, conferring, and short written responses, are being considered for assessing students' understanding during the lesson as instructional practices to be embedded across all classroom lessons for the upcoming school year.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing

Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry based professional collaborations. However, the practice of analyzing assessment data and student work with the goal to improve teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students is not yet systematized. Leadership structures that allow teachers a voice in key decisions are developing.

Impact
Teacher team collaborations are beginning to result in improved teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Although teacher teams incorporate the practice of examining student work, common assessment criteria to norm and guide the work of teachers in adjusting tasks and determining progress towards team goals is in the initial stages. For example, during an observed teacher team meeting, grade 7 ELA teachers were in the process of analyzing student journals to adjust the culminating task in the instructional units.

- Teacher teams meet regularly to examine their own work as well as examine student work to adjust teaching practices. For example, grade level teams meet weekly to plan grade level activities to improve the students' social-academic well-being. Teachers use Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports incentives, share collated data about focus students, and make strategic decisions around interdisciplinary planning and student placement. The ELA teacher teams meet with a Generation Ready consultant twice a month to increase the utilization of the professional development period and design clear goals for other subject areas based on teachers' strengths and needs. In this way, teachers have begun to embed team structures to use student work data and teacher pedagogy to devise grade-wide ways of addressing student needs and improving teacher practice.

- There are some opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles to affect student learning. For example, teachers are given the opportunity to develop and refine leadership capacity during daily teacher team meeting time. Teachers then inform the principal of desired support and continued training. As a result, a number of teachers, along with the principal, have attended multiple professional development opportunities within the Generation Ready Leadership Cohort. Other leadership capacity-building structures are developing to involve more teachers in key decisions regarding student achievement across the school.