



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

J.H.S. 127 The Castle Hill

Middle School X127

1560 Purdy Street

BRONX

NY 10462

Principal: Harry Sherman

Dates of review: February 6, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Maria Lopez

The School Context

J.H.S. 127 The Castle Hill is a/an Middle school with 733 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 24% Black, 40% Hispanic, 3% White, and 32% Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-15 was 93.8%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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	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	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

All teachers are engaged in consistently examining teacher practice and student data within inquiry-based structured professional collaborations. Distributed teacher leadership is embedded across all areas of the school.

Impact

Teacher teams meet regularly to assess students skill levels and make instructional decisions to meet schools goals and share best teaching practices that reflect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaboratively engage in refining and adjusting the curriculum as well as analyze student data during structured teacher team time slots. Teacher teams engage in the process of backwards planning and reach consensus on refinements of curriculum through the use of protocols.
- Strategic scheduling allows for teachers to meet in a variety of time slots such as grade, content, special education, and academic and intervention teams where teachers have opportunities to analyze data, content and student work relating to a specific area of focus as well as make adjustments about curriculum and instruction.
- The school provides distributive leadership opportunities for teachers and empower them to develop and implement rigorous and cognitively engaging lessons, units and assessments as well as make decisions on curriculum and instructional practices. Furthermore, teachers provide each other professional development based on the Danielson Framework for teaching and share best practices, strategies and resources.
- School meetings embody a team approach to planning and decision-making. Teachers collaboratively plan with the end in mind. They work to reach consensus on expectations through norming of common assessments and the development of department grading policies. They create common assessments, examine data, identify their instructional implications, and revise as necessary. With the focus area of using evidence effectively, this has led to rigorous learning outcomes in all content areas. In English language arts students have been developing strong Evidence Based Claims, supported with the strongest evidence and reasoning. In mathematics, students have been learning to explain their reasoning, and critique the reasoning of others. In Social Studies, students have been learning to analyze documents, and use evidence to support conclusions and in Science, students have been learning to write hypothesis, and support them with a strong analysis of evidence.
- Teacher teamwork is truly distributive –Teams are facilitated by teacher leaders and provides the opportunity for teachers to share and grow as peer leaders. Teachers provide each other professional development and share best practices and successful strategies and resources. This has resulted in a collaborative and pedagogically strong staff.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practice reflects the belief that all students learn best when they are actively engaged in learning collaborations that involve high-level discussions and the exploration of rigorous tasks.

Impact

Teacher practice that pushes student thinking, engages students with high level questioning, and encourages student-to-student discussions, was viewed consistently across classrooms. As a result, all students were able to complete challenging tasks or demonstrate higher-order thinking through writing and discussion.

Supporting Evidence

- In a Grade 6 English language arts class teaching strategies provided multiple entry points with four different learning stations and six different tasks. There was a parking lot for students to place wonderings about the lesson.
- Teachers used running record as the students were working in groups. Running record, conferencing and checking for understanding were evident in most classrooms.
- When speaking to students, they understood and were able to explain the rubrics they used to assess themselves and to assess each other. Students were also able to explain the criteria needed to rotate from one learning station to the next.
- High order level questions from teachers as well as from students were evident in most classrooms visited.
- In the 7th grade- instructional co-teaching class, there were 20 students and although students had the same reading articles, students were asked to complete different tasks. There were four different groups and each group was asked to identify 1- literal claim, 2- evaluate and prove, 3- write original claims, and 4- Identify evidence respectively.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across grades and content areas, curricula is aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts to give all students access to rigorous tasks that promote college and career readiness.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions build coherence across grade and content areas promoting academic tasks, higher order questioning and thinking aligned to college and career readiness. Academic tasks are planned using student work to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- All core subject areas in all grades have developed Common Core aligned units and lesson plans with instructional practices informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Tasks and lessons within units consistently ask students to demonstrate strategic and extended thinking. A grade 8 lesson plan in Earth Science asks students to produce a clear and coherent response to finding the epicenter of an earthquake as well as demonstrate their points on a seismograph.
- Teachers meet once a week in department and during grade team meetings to create and modify tasks to ensure they emphasize rigorous higher order thinking skills. End of unit tasks and samples of student work displayed in the hallways were evident as well as student portfolios aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.
- Lesson plans are written to cognitively engage learners, requiring students to cite evidence to support a claim, analyze information, hypothesize, draw conclusions, and apply concepts to solve real-world problems in all subject areas. In a social studies lesson plan, students are required to cite specific textual evidence to support the analysis of primary and secondary documents. In another lesson plan, students are required to use variables to translate real-world equations and transfer the information to a ratio table while documenting their justification to the response.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use common assessments. Assessment practices consistently incorporate the use of ongoing checks for understanding and self and peer reflection.

Impact

Teacher collaboration on data analysis results in modifications to curricula and instruction. Daily reflections and checks for understanding lead to effective instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses common assessments such as teacher created common core aligned assessments and performance series to determine progress towards goals across grades and subject areas. In addition, teachers use questioning and discussion, gallery walks, fishbowl discussion and peer editing. Teachers have adopted a common rubric for use in developing written arguments in science, social studies, math and English language arts. Grade and content teams use this information to modify curricula and instructional strategies.
- Exit slips are used in all classrooms and are reviewed daily to modify grouping and/or delivery of content for the following day. For example, in a grade 6 mathematics class the teacher ended the class by asking student to complete an exit slip where students were asked to discuss the errors found in their problem and tools used to determine the errors and solutions.
- Students use rubrics for writing and discussion to guide their work through self and peer-reflection. Teachers review student self and peer reflections, looking for trends, to make lesson modifications and provide supports. For instance in grade 8 Bengali bilingual class students used rubrics while working through four stations to finalize their writings. At each station students had an opportunity to reflect and peer edit their work.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

High expectations are conveyed to teachers through ongoing professional development aligned the Danielson Framework for Teaching. High expectations are communicated to students, grounded in Common Core Learning Standards and College and Career Readiness, with ongoing advisements and supports.

Impact

Staff, students and families are well supported towards progress in meeting school expectations and parents understand the expectations established for their children.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal meets with staff as a group and individually to discuss school-wide and individual expectations and goals for classroom teaching practices. Weekly and monthly professional developments based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching is provided collaboratively with staff. In addition, the school provides times for inter-visitations for staff around "Best Practices" with staff to ensure coherence in understanding school wide high expectations for teaching and learning.
- The school conducts one-on-one conferences with the teachers based on teacher goals and teacher reflections. Conferences discuss student outcomes along with specific next steps and follow up material. For example, one conference document highlighted that the grade 7 Mathematics teacher is to be involved in a "Peer Partner" study of student work.
- During the parent meeting, parents articulated how the school does an excellent job of informing them of all upcoming events as well as provides regular updates about their children’s academic and behavioral progress. All parents stated that teachers regularly call them to inform them of how their children are doing in class, inform them on upcoming exam dates, and alert them of missing assignments. Parents also spoke to how teachers provide parents with on-line resources, regularly answer emails and phone calls, and provide tutorials and information to difficult problems in order to help them monitor and support their children at home.