



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Grove Hill School

Elementary School X157

**757 Cauldwell Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Ramona Duran

Date of review: February 6, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

The School Context

The Grove Hill School is an elementary school with 664 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 31% Black, 67% Hispanic, 1% White and Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 8% 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 90.0%.

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	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	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	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

Teacher team meetings are structured collaborative opportunities where teachers learn from each other as they grow into leadership roles in support of the professional development earmarked to improve instruction and student achievement.

Impact

Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that result in shared improvements in teacher capacity and mastery of goals for groups of students across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams come together on a frequent basis to share the successful implementation of their classroom practices. Team meetings are the “DNA” of the school. Teachers see this process as an essential non-mandated requirement of their growth as teachers. They hold each other accountable for the work that is driven by data sources they use in their classrooms, thereby, feeling empowered by the school leadership to make important decisions for student academic achievement as well as their own growth. For example, having examined student work, they identify the agreed-upon strategies they implemented and share the outcomes. At times, the outcomes are common and teams celebrate these trends. Nonetheless, there is even more celebration when they share differentiated results that help them build on each other’s strengths for grade-wide next steps to decrease the learning gaps.
- As teachers engage in horizontal and vertical meetings, they discuss practices across all grades to ensure there is coherence and a sense of ‘embedded’ perspectives on how to improve the delivery of instruction and capture real student engagement. Discussions are very animated as teachers build on each other’s ideas and observations. This ongoing collaboration has built trust and ownership as well as provides teachers with a risk-free professional learning environment geared towards development. For example, these meetings have led to interdisciplinary focus on writing which has become a school-wide focal point. This had led to increased volume in student writing across all grades and content areas. Teacher-led professional development sessions are at the core of the school-wide goal in teacher growth and team work. Discussions and group work lead to much reflection on the work achieved thus far and how to build towards student independence. Teachers refer to barriers in writing, “CAFÉ” strategies, and how to organize students’ thinking through the use of graphic organizers.
- The Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are in place for all teachers to engage in weekly conversations focused on college and career readiness, skill-sets that can be embedded across all content areas and data-driven strategy groups in order to provide curricular access to all learners. Teachers appreciate the opportunity to make key decisions for student achievement. For example, teachers have decided to pair up grade level teams to ensure that there is clarity around instructional expectations from the past, present and future. As these teachers engage in the research-based conversations, they have become more adept in the understanding of the Common Core and the implication to their craft across grades.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Pedagogical practices are informed by the school-wide beliefs about how students learn best, are aligned to the curricula and address the needs of individual students through a variety of techniques and strategies that provide multiple entry points.

Impact

Although there are improved teacher practices across content areas with increased evidence of higher order thinking skills in student work, these practices are not yet embedded across all classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are exposed to themes that lead them to make real-world connections. They engage in debates and meaningful conversations that help them relate to their own personal experiences. This also leads to connections made across content areas which results in authentic learning that advances their understanding of a specific topic. Student-led discussions provide students with a sense of confidence and ownership of their learning. They are challenged to think and respond with evidence to back up their points of view in literacy and how they problem-solve in math. Students are well aware of the importance of using academic vocabulary to support their discussions with their peers as evident when listening to student discussion in a fifth grade class where students used real-world measurements to discuss how this knowledge impacts on their health wellness. Students were challenged via higher-order questions that led to authentic discussions where students' thinking was consistently 'pushed' by the teacher and the peers. However, these practices have not gained traction across all classrooms yet.
- As teachers execute instruction, they ensure that various instructional strategies are developmentally appropriate with scaffolds that meet students at their multiple entry points. The intrinsic belief that students learn best when teachers differentiate their practices through a variety of instructional supports such as graphic organizers, vocabulary development activities and 'scaffolded' questions to challenge all learners to think critically at their appropriate levels is evident in many classrooms. With this in mind, teachers continue their learning to ensure that all students' needs are met and these practices become embedded.
- Students engage in project-based learning activities where they conduct research on topics that help them develop their cognitive skills. As they begin to see the relevancy of their learning, they make connections to other content areas. The school-wide exposure to the arts provides all students with opportunities to connect their learning to real-world experiences. For example, social studies topics such as the study of countries around the world leads to students delving into the cultural aspects of a particular country resulting in an art project such as an authentic painting, the creation of an artifact or an artistic performance. This type of interdisciplinary connection appeals to the learning styles and areas of interest of individual students.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

There is a seamless alignment between the common formative and summative assessments and the curricula contributing to a clear portrait of student mastery and constant classroom monitoring of the instructional impact to student achievement.

Impact

Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and provide actionable and meaningful feedback so that students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The use of baseline assessments in literacy and math provides teachers with vital information on students' strengths and areas in need of focus. This data determines the differentiated interventions before, during and after school subscribed to students. The baseline and midyear data in literacy, math, and writing show a marked decrease of students in the lowest quartile and an increase towards proficiency across grades. These data outcomes have resulted in the development of action plans across grades to ensure that the upward trend of student performance continues.
- The grade-specific benchmarks and age-appropriate rubrics are in place to ensure that students' instructional progress is monitored in a seamless manner without interrupting the school-wide instructional flow. Students engage in conferences with their teachers as they have conversations on their progress and their next steps towards improvement. The actionable feedback teachers provide students during these data talks result in clear expectations and students knowing what to do to achieve. For example, students indicate that these talks with their teachers inspire them to continue to grow and excel. They understand what they need to do next due to teachers' clarity when guiding them through the work.
- School leaders ensure that they share with teachers comparative analyses of school-wide data on reading and math scores as a starting point for grade discussions. These granular analyses lead to vertical discussions where all teachers capture the importance of making key data-driven instructional decisions in collaboration with colleagues on how their planning must align to students' differentiated needs. In the vast majority of classes, students are engrossed in small group work and/or discussions while teachers consistently check for student understanding. Differentiated planning and ongoing monitoring of student progress has led to tiered interventions for academic success. The outcomes of these interventions are summarized on a school-wide data sheet available to all teachers and service providers.

Findings

The school has aligned its curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrated instructional shifts.

Impact

Strategic implementation of Common Core-aligned curricula ensure instructional coherence in planning that challenges students intellectually as they engage in rigorous performance tasks and class discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers plan lessons that reflect Depth of Knowledge (DOK) high-level questions and activities that require students to think critically and engage in multi-step exercises that promote in-depth conversations amongst peers before actually deriving an answer. In classrooms, there is evidence of collaborative learning where students support each other as they work together and/or engage in 'turn-and-talk' during rigorous academic tasks.
- Classroom activities are designed to ensure the engagement of all learners with strategic tasks that help elevate students' cognitive level of comprehension. Therefore, the curricula and tasks are reflective of rigorous habits which are well-planned and refined via use of student work and data intended to meet the needs of all learners. The school-wide Theory of Action reflects a clear picture of the focus on student achievement through a variety of research-based strategies that result in rigorous modes of teaching and learning.
- Teacher-facilitated professional development sessions are carefully planned based on the Common Core expectations and infused rigor. The school has designed a checklist for planning professional development meetings that engage all participants in rigorous discussions on the gradual release of cognitively-challenging lessons where students take ownership of their learning and demonstrate intellectual independence. In addition, the school-wide focus on interdisciplinary writing across content areas and grades is evidence of how teachers have planned lessons that challenge students to be explicit in their authentic work. Students can articulate how the rubrics used to assess their work contribute to the volume and content of their writing.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leader and teachers consistently communicate high expectations to all stakeholders and provide support.

Impact

The communication of high expectations establishes a culture for learning that results in collaboration, professionalism and mutual accountability for student academic and personal achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents and staff are well aware of school-wide expectations. The ongoing communication lends to clarity and trust, thus strengthening community ties to ensure that students' achievement are always at the core of all conversations and interactions. Communication with families is evident through daily contacts with teachers, activities, art and concert celebrations, Open Houses, and informational meetings. Attendance is closely monitored via a school-wide tracker that regularly informs the school community of progress and areas of concern. The three year comparison is analyzed so that staff, students and families see the direct impact of attendance on academic performance. Trips to nearby schools and colleges provide students with opportunities to connect with the importance of education and their preparation for the future. Teachers share with students their experiences as college students so that they can see for themselves the manner in which higher knowledge can open doors to future personal benefits. The college and career awareness bulletin board displays pictures of all staff members in their caps and gowns and descriptions on their Alma Maters and educational background. Students and their families can observe at a glance the benefits educational readiness brings.
- The Danielson Framework for Teaching is an important staff development tool used to refine teacher thinking and expectations around teaching and learning. Teachers hold each other accountable as they ensure that their Professional Learning Community (PLC) emanates collaboration and professionalism focused on their own learning in order to provide students with the quality education they deserve. This journey towards excellence and high expectations is palpable in teacher energy and evidentiary camaraderie in their daily meetings and planning sessions.
- The leadership and teachers meet to discuss the individual needs of students on a regular basis to ensure that the teaching practices hone in on the skills that will encourage students to excel. Teachers are consistently engaged in differentiated professional development that contributes to their implementation of research-based strategies in classrooms. The outcomes of this implementation are discussed amongst teachers during their meetings for further learning.