



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The School of International Cultures**

**Elementary School X179**

**468 East 140<sup>th</sup> Street  
Bronx  
NY 10454**

**Principal: Sherry Font-Williams**

**Date of review: April 17, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

## The School Context

The School of International Cultures is an elementary school with 388 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 16% Black, 81% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 32% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.0%.

## 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>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

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

### Impact

Established inquiry-based collaborative practices promote the achievement of school goals, the implementation of Common Core, and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers. Further, defined leadership structures enable teachers to have a voice in key decisions that promote improved pedagogy and shared leadership with a focus on improvement of student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in inquiry teams where they look at student work samples from high, medium, and low achievers, on a reading performance assessment to determine common strengths and challenges across the grade. Consequently, teachers can determine next steps to reteach in a different manner for an upcoming writing unit. One team, including teachers for English language learners, general education, and integrated co-teachers (ICT), looked at student essays to determine how to differentiate for all learners, to provide extensions for the quick finishers, the strugglers, and those in the middle. One teacher stated and all agreed that this collegiality has helped her grow professionally and instructionally. “We enjoy working together because it is collaborative where we all bring something to the table, whether as a senior team member or with fresh ideas, we gain and grow to help our students—it is a win-win.”
- The school uses a distributed leadership model, whereby teacher leaders facilitate teacher team meetings. This is the outcome of a revision to the previous model, because upon reflection they found that instead of facilitating the meetings, the teacher leader was carrying much of the work. Now with additional training, the teacher leaders, teams, and administration, stated they are pleased with the revised system and structure because the meetings are facilitated by different teachers weekly, now providing all teachers a voice in curricula and instruction. For example in a teacher team meeting while one teacher mainly facilitated, all participated by providing feedback, results, and suggested next steps. Additionally, an agenda and notes were taken to track meeting goals and outcomes and are being monitored by administration. The grade is also piloting using google.docs to store their curricula and their meeting agendas and notes.
- A teacher team discussed how they formed a professional development committee, surveyed the staff for their interests and requests, and determined a professional development calendar. The teachers stated that they create and deliver professional development to the staff. Additionally, they stated that they are encouraged to find and attend professional development outside of the school that is routinely approved. For instance, one teacher stated that during a post-observation conference with the principal she had asked to attend an outside professional development session on guided reading. The principal approved and after the professional development sessions, the principal observed the teacher employ the newly gained strategies on guided reading.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

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

### Impact

The use of aligned common assessments allows staff to provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and teachers use the results to adjust curricula and instruction, but do not yet sufficiently create a portrait of student mastery.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use common assessments from ReadyGen, supplemented with Teachers College (TC), Fountas and Pinnell, SmartyPants for Response to Intervention (Rtl) for English language arts, and GoMath for math. The focus on common assessments every 6 to 8 weeks is supplemented with components from TC as teachers conduct running records and track students' progress toward literacy goals. Students stated that they know their current reading levels and goal levels. Teachers stated that they use the results of the common assessments to adjust curricula and this was evident at a teacher team meeting where they reviewed students' reading performance assessment results to determine next steps in a writing unit.
- As observed on bulletin boards, in notebooks, and in portfolios, feedback to students is rooted in the rubric and actionable. In one, the teacher wrote, "I like how you indented and wrote two details in your response" and provided a next step, "Make sure you spell 'word wall' words correctly and add commas." In certain instances, feedback included student self-reflections on a separate paper stapled to the work and the score the student believed he should have and why. Although this practice provides students with reflective skills practice, it is in the beginning stages, used by some teachers, and shows some inconsistencies. The inconsistency lies in that some teachers and students' comments reflect the rubric components while others do not. Additionally, many include only the teacher comment. In one sample, a student stated she deserved a 3 because she explained how she got her answer and also showed all of her work. The teacher's comment gave positive reinforcement as well as feedback rooted in the rubric. "Your organization is neat and your calculations are accurate." Yet another student responded, "I deserve a 4 because I made sure I rechecked my work to see if I missed a piece or forgot a graphic." On the teacher comment, there are positive comments and a reminder of a missing fact about crabs but no next steps, while the student comment is a thank you note.
- Teachers analyze assessment data from common assessments as well as daily formative assessments. In the Rtl class, the teacher assesses students every 6 to 8 weeks and re-evaluates their needs, goals, and next steps. A review of the data demonstrates that some students are able to gain mastery of standards and move out of the RTI services while others move up and plateau and then recommended for another round of services until they demonstrate mastery of standards. Teachers use running records to determine a plan for guided reading and small group instruction. An example includes the use of a graphic organizer to list students' reading level, group, instructional level, and focus teaching points, which aligns with lesson plans.

## Additional Findings

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

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

### Impact

The purposeful curricular decisions to build coherence and provide access to cognitively engaging tasks promote college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula demonstrates unit plans, scope and sequence, and lesson plans, that are Common Core aligned and promote college and career readiness for all students. The school adopted ReadyGen, and supplements with components from Teachers College Writing and Reading program as well as Fountas and Pinnell. For math the school uses GoMath. The curricula include the Common Core and State standards, big ideas, essential questions, Depth of Knowledge (DoK) leveled questions, academic vocabulary, resources for Universal Design for Learning, project bundles, key texts, culminating activities, small group work with tiered activities, and data-determined groups. For example, a grade 5 literacy lesson plan incorporates DoK leveled questions to spiral the rigor upwards as it moves deeper into the learning of a complex non-fiction text. Similarly, a third grade science plan also lists DoK leveled questions and provides real world examples. Many unit plans, scope and sequence, and lesson plans are hand-written and they follow the same format and include the same components.
- Across all curricula there is evidence of refinement to meet the needs of all learners. For example, a second grade reading lesson demonstrates planning for a small group using a leveled text to support those who are struggling with the main idea as determined by a quick check assessment. Likewise, the plan provides extensions for those who are working towards mastery. In a first grade English language learner lesson plan there is evidence that prior to students moving into tiered groups, a quick assessment will be given to determine student levels of understanding and there are three levels of groups, reteach, independent and enrichment. This same data-determined grouping is evident in a fourth grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) lesson.
- On bulletin boards, teachers not only post student work with reflection and goal setting, the task, Common Core, State standards, and rubric, but also a process statement explaining what students had completed prior to this unit and how the unit was revised based on the assessment results. For example in a fourth grade unit on writing information text about a topic students studied, they published a book about their chosen topic. Prior to the unit, students completed an on-demand writing assessment to determine areas of focus and areas of celebration. The data showed that students required a focus on the structure of the report and so the unit required time spent on studying mentor informational texts and on the development of elaboration strategies.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula, reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best, and consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

### Impact

The Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts inform teaching practices so that all learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student products.

### Supporting Evidence

- The administration and staff believe that students learn best by doing and being a part of the conversation. Staff employed the workshop model, as well as the use of graphic organizers, visual cues, manipulatives, and anchor charts, to support multiple entry points for all learners into the curricula. For example, in a first/second grade split bilingual math class, students worked in small groups solving grade-level work. In one group, the second grade students worked on whiteboard slates to solve three-digit number subtraction with regrouping, while in another group the first grade students used tens and ones blocks to add and subtract two-digit numbers to gain place value understanding. The school belief about how students learn best was also evident in a kindergarten class, where the lesson began with the teacher reading to students who were sitting on the rug. The book was about colors and mixing them. After a think-pair-share about creating new colors from mixing primary colors, students returned to their desks to begin an experiment mixing first one and then a second food coloring into icing. Students were engaged as they predicted the colors, discussed the outcomes, and ate the results they had placed on cookies.
- In a fourth grade class, students sat on the rug to complete a K-W-L (I know, I want to know, I learned) graphic organizer, using nonfiction text to learn about the new topic of earthquakes. Students worked on the K-W columns and then shared with a partner what they know and want to know. After sharing out whole group, the teacher reminded students to use their stoplight, one each of red, yellow, and green colored circle cards on a ring, to show how well they understood the reading. Students flash the green card to show 'I understand', yellow for 'I am a little unsure', and red for 'I am not sure at all', to give students a voice and engage them during the lesson. Similarly, in a fifth grade literacy class students sat on the rug and used a highly complex nonfiction text to gather cite-based evidence and jot down the details to find the author's tone. Students shared their details in a turn-and-talk and discussed, agreeing and/or disagreeing, on the tone.
- In a fifth grade ICT math class, students worked in groups on a geometry task about converting units of measure. One group worked with the special education teacher, while another worked independently, and the third group worked with the general education teacher. Students availed themselves of the multiple anchor charts to support their learning. The independent and general education groups then switched places. One student was provided an extension as he demonstrated mastery of the skills. Similarly, in a second grade ICT literacy class, students worked in groups to cite text-based evidence about character. Students in both groups were encouraged to use the anchor charts to support their learning.

<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 the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations to families that are connected to a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

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

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal and assistant principal consistently communicate high expectations to staff via varied sources, including emailed observation feedback, bulletins regarding instruction, staff handbook, professional development, and the observation cycle aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Professional development sessions are key to this process. Sessions provided by the administration are aligned to using assessment to drive instruction, 3d of the Danielson Framework. Additionally, the teacher-run professional development committee creates and delivers professional development with additional sessions conducted by consultants and the network, and teachers go outside of the school for additional opportunities.
- Administration holds staff accountable through a cycle of frequent classroom observations, feedback sessions. A review of teacher observations demonstrate the actionable feedback for high expectations that leads to professional growth as it is supported through intervisitations, coaching, and professional development opportunities. Administration also contracts with Live United, through the United Way, to include teacher training and administrative coaching.
- Parents expressed that they have had opportunities for workshops on the Common Core Learning Standards. Parents also shared that they have attended other workshops regarding selecting a middle school. Parents agreed that there are several ways the school prepares their children to be college and career ready, including by college tutors who support students and build relationships as they communicate about college and career requirements. Parents spoke about the fifth grade research project to write a letter to the admissions office of a college of their choice, describing why they should be accepted. Students agreed this was an exciting project as they learned about colleges and careers. Additionally, the school produces a career day where students learn about different careers, research at least two, and report on them. Additionally, parents were change agents and brought to fruition the idea of the fifth grade being departmentalized and stated they agree that it bridged the change from elementary to middle school.
- Parents stated that they are pleased with the school's transparent communication regarding their children's progress toward goals. They stated that if they are in doubt about homework or assignments they can contact the teacher and are pleased to get prompt replies. Parents stated that they receive progress reports to inform them of their children's achievements. They are excited to begin using the new web-based grading program, Datacation as another way in which to know their children's performance and progress.