Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Pablo Casals I.S. 181

Middle School X181

800 Baychester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10475

Principal: Christopher Warnock

Date of review: March 13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.

The School Context

Pablo Casals I.S. 181 is a middle school with 873 students from grades 6 through 8. The school population comprises 65% Black, 25% Hispanic, 3% White, 6% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 19% 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 93.5%.

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	**Celebration**	**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	**Additional Findings**	**Well Developed**
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		
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	**Focus**	**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**	**Well Developed**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects.

Impact
Coherence exists across grades and subject areas that promotes college and career readiness for all students. All learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula revealed several gaps in math with the Common Core changes. For example, fractions were a 6th grade standard that became a 5th grade standard. As a result, the school made modifications to supplement Pearson's *Connected Mathematics Project 3*™ *(CMP3)*. They concluded that the investigations, share-outs, discussions were strong and have maintained these routines as they incorporated the school's own thematic units and project-based activities and videos to apply math concepts. Resources from the state's EngageNY website and teacher editions of *GO Math!* are also infused within the curriculum. Grade 6 has fully moved its units to a restaurant theme. The school is in the process of modifying the grade 6 curriculum to further incorporate some of the 7th and 8th grade standards.

- The school adopted Scholastic's Common Core *CODE X*™ program last year. "There was not a lot of text and some of the text was not engaging therefore it wasn't meeting our needs," said the principal. The school felt that *CODE X*™ lacked identified learning targets and student activities, and also that the activities were redundant. In response, the school revamped the curricular units and increased the amount of text with an emphasis on embedding the instructional shifts and making a connection between narrative and informational text. When it was determined that their curriculum shifted too much towards non-fiction, the school infused more novels. They identified seven unit themes for each grade level and every lesson has "I Can Statement." The principal said the school's science goal was to "make the subject come alive." The school participates in a program called "SciPlay" housed at the New York Hall of Science (NYSCI), which uses research-based strategies to foster playfulness in the learning and teaching of complex scientific concepts. Revisions were made to the school's U.S. History Regents curriculum to incorporate discussion protocols and increase the use of technology.

- The following programs are implemented to address the needs of at-risk students: the *Wilson Reading System*®, *Great Leaps Reading & Math* programs, and the *Rewards*® literacy intervention program. *Word Generation* is used to address vocabulary skills, which teacher teams identified as an area of weakness for ELLs and students with disabilities. A grade 8 English Language Arts (ELA) unit focused on *The War of the Worlds* and ELLs were provided individualized handouts with definitions, pictures, and sentences using the word in context. Online supports, such as *Raz-Kids* and *Learning A-Z* are used to increase the performance of students with disabilities and ELLs. *NewsELA* is also used to provide nonfiction articles at different Lexile Levels.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Although expectations connected to college and career readiness are consistently communicated by school leaders and staff, partnerships with parents are evolving. There is a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students through feedback and guidance.

Impact
Feedback helps families understand student progress toward high expectations, however the mainly one-way communications with parents do not yet consistently support strong partnerships.

Supporting Evidence

- A monthly parent letter communicates calendar events, reminders and special events. The school translates all disseminated information in Spanish and French-Creole, and sign language for deaf parents is available. Although a significant number of parents participated in the Quality Review interview, parents reported that Parent-Teacher Association meetings are poorly attended. However parent-teacher conferences are well-attended. Two monthly workshops for parents are held—one is informational and the other is celebratory. Parents described their confusion about the Common Core Standards, yet to date there has been only one evening workshop on Common Core-aligned math this school year. Parents stated that there were not many parent workshops last year, however following the school becoming eligible for Title I funding in September 2014, a questionnaire was sent to inform the school's choice of parent workshop topics. The principal acknowledged that the school has never done an evaluation of parent workshop effectiveness.

- Parents and students have access to an online grade book called *TeacherEase*™ through which teachers can communicate about student progress. The school's *Weebly* website lists teachers email addresses and describes student assignments. An area of focus for the school is its supportive communications that empower parent as partners. For example, the school sent a letter to parents announcing a "Book-In-A-Bag Reading Program." "By signing your child's daily reading log, we are ensuring that both the family and the school is involved in supporting the student in achieving reading success," stated the letter.

- A student handbook highlights the school's (a) recognition that regular for attendance as a major component of academic success, (b) teaching of good work habits and responsibility by stressing the importance of being on time for school, (c) celebrations of student success, and (d) expectations for appropriate school attire and respect for authority. A new mentoring program called "I Will Graduate," highlights different characteristics of high school and college attendance. Monthly assemblies focus on a variety of college- and career-related topics. Students reported they no longer have advisory periods. "We miss it, but we still get the information," said a student. Bulletins are sent to teachers by the literacy and math departments to ensure that everyone is aware of school priorities. The literacy bulletin includes such information as clear expectations for three learning activities per week along with assessments and homework entered in *Teacherease*™, student work products, professional development on such topics as questioning, monitoring independent reading, and the availability of testing guides on EngageNY. "The Square Root" math bulletin highlights such topics as student portfolio reviews, promotion-in-doubt, and bulletin board updates. Both bulletins include a "good and welfare" section.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curricula.

Impact
Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts, as well as by discussions at the team and school level. All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The acronym A.C.T.I.V.E., which represents Alignment; Choice; Time, Inquiry, Varied, and Engagement, has been embraced school-wide by administrators and teachers to guide their planning and delivery of instruction. For example, following a January 2015 professional development on questioning, teachers were encouraged to use A.C.T.I.V.E. to determine if their questions and tasks aligned to the learning target, if student choice was included in the task, to think about how time influences the task in terms of rigor, where the inquiry the students will engage in fall on Bloom's Taxonomy or Depth of Knowledge, the varied methods used to influence learning and assessment, and the ways everyone is being involved. "The key is the "V" for varied," said the principal. "Sometimes, teachers get stuck in a style and when they see a varied approach, they adapt and incorporate other best practices." In addition, teachers use the Danielson rubric during focused intervisitations.

- The lesson objectives in a grade 8 ELA class included using evidence from the text to support opinions and ideas and to respond to others' comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas. The class was engaged in a Socratic seminar discussion comparing major themes of two books: *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Student 1: "I respectfully disagree with everyone that Lenny knows right from wrong. On page 91, he breaks her neck but he doesn't realize he killed her and was panicking. He was in pain because George kept on punching him." Student 2: "When he shook and killed her, he knew he did something bad." Teacher: "So does that make him a mockingbird?" Student 3: "A mockingbird represents innocence and he's not a mockingbird because he could not control himself." Students were actively involved in accountable talk using evidence-based responses.

- Students in a grade 6 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) math class worked with partners on differentiated tasks to determine the area of a composite figure by decomposing it into regular polygons. Students were guided by such questions as "what shapes are present?" "What formulas are necessary?" and "What do we know about opposite sides of a rectangle?" The school intentionally departmentalized special education and the self-contained department shifted to content area expertise. The school has experienced success with departmentalization and therefore the model has been expanded. A student can take an honors math class and get the support they need in literacy through the content specialists and programming. Some of the school's sixth-grade students are pulled out for intervention services by M.S. 181's partner school, P.S. 176.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact
Actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement is provided. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all student learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a formal "assessment vision" comprised of the following four stated components: (1) alignment of assessments to curricula; (2) analysis of student work; (3) adjusting curricula; and (4) creation of a next step instructional reaction plan. "One of the things we did that we're very proud of is that we used resources to analyze Tier 1 interventions," said the principal. "When the instructional shifts in mathematics came out, we created a mastery test," said the principal. Teachers use item analysis to understand the areas in which students are struggling. The school's ELA performance task data indicated that students were having trouble with making inferences and finding evidence to support claims. Fountas & Pinnell running records are used in special education classrooms. Data from various unit tests and identified vocabulary as a deficit in both reading and writing. In response, teachers incorporated more contextualized visuals and images within lessons to improve comprehension.

- Students reported that they receive rubrics at the beginning of a lesson, which are often used for peer editing and peer grading. The school's literacy grading policy specifies that students' grades will be computed for each marking period based on the following criteria: (a) Assessments and Projects (30%) including class exams, quizzes, final exams, formal writing pieces, culminating activities, presentations, on-target reading responses, and unit performance tasks; (b) Instructional and Learning Activities (60%) including entrance and exit activities, learning activity tasks, formal writing (brainstorming, planning, drafts, revisions), participation in formative assessments, class discussions and group involvement, and self- and peer-evaluation; and (c) Graded Homework Assignments (10%). Teachers maintain and regularly update "On-Target" charts with stickers reflecting students' independent reading accomplishments. Students said they know that they are doing well in a class from teacher feedback with glows (strengths) and grows (next steps), compliments and stickers, homework grades, and practice tests. They also have access to *TeacherEase*™, which a student said he accesses "to see what I can improve in."

- Teachers check for student understanding with short mastery quizzes at the end of a few learning targets, unit-aligned performance tasks, stop-and-jot tasks, and end-of-unit test. Teachers use checklists to monitor student preparedness, attention to detail, and evidence-based explanations. Math teachers stated that they use a "Ticket Out The Door" as a Common Core-aligned post-lesson assessment of student learning. For example, following a lesson focused on finding systems of equations using elimination, students completed a Ticket Out The Door requiring them to choose the first step and then solve the following equations: $3x-y=15$ and $2x+3y=10$. Students also had to write their own word problem and describe their thought process.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promoted the implementation of the Common Core. Distributed leadership structures exist at this school.

Impact
There is school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Effective teacher leadership exists in this school and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During a grade 8 teacher team meeting, three literacy teachers and one special education teacher reviewed reflection sheets from a unit they recently completed. Teachers reviewed data from the unit's final exams and writing performance tasks for their individual classes, and noticed a significant increase from students performing below standard to students approaching standard after the unit delivery. Grade deficits were then discussed as well as potential interventions. For example, using visual aids to support vocabulary for ELL students, and "unpacking the task" to make sure students are actually answering the questions was discussed. Finally, teachers shared best practices that they or other teachers have had success with in order to close the identified gaps. For example, the acronym TWEEC (Text, Why, Example, Explain, Conclusion) was shared to help students remember key components with responding to a question.

- During the previous week's grade team meeting, teachers engaged in looking at student work through norming artifacts as evidence of high, medium, and low student samples. At the end of the meeting, teachers were assigned a task to complete before the next meeting date. They also talked about the need to maximize instructional time in ICT classes using multiple choice questions, and how this could be accomplished by distributing reciprocal reading sheets, and dry erase boards for quick visuals of multiple choice.

- The school's collaborative grade teams are facilitated by grade team leaders, who meet with the assistant principals weekly. The expectation is that teachers will rotate different roles to support the work of the team. The work of teacher teams resulted in the identification of the school's current instructional focus on intellectual engagement that drives student-centered learning. Their ongoing work for the past few years on the design, implementation, and evaluation of Common Core-aligned unit plans has resulted in increased levels of teacher practice and student achievement.