



Quality Review Report

2014 - 2015

Morris Heights Elementary School

09X204

1780 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

Bronx, NY 10453

Principal: Amanda Blatter

Date of review: 12/ 2 /2014

Lead Reviewer: Cheryl McClendon

The School Context

PS204 Morris Heights is an elementary school with 592 students from grades pre-k through grade 5. The school population comprises 29% Black, 69% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.0%.

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	Proficient
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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-driven professional learning opportunities that engage them in ongoing systematic instructional analysis comprising looking at student work and assessments and identifying focal teaching points.

Impact

Within collaborative teams, teachers consistently enhance their practice and ensure the attainment of learning goals for students. Teamwork has strengthened teacher instructional capacity, supported the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and promoted increased achievement for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- School documents show that the principal, assistant principals and teacher leaders facilitate Professional Learning Cycles (PLC), focusing on teacher selected topics. Topics include “Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques”, Strategies for ELLs and SWDs”, “Using Assessment in Instruction”, “Writing with Text Evidence”, “ Math through Music and Dance”, “Rewards and Incentives” and “Art and Emotions”. Currently, teachers are in cycle 1, for which four topics have been offered. During PLC sessions, faculty members set learning goals, engage in text-based discussions, analyze pertinent artifacts and documents and plan next steps.
- The principal stated that, in partnership with Learning Center Initiatives, grade teams meet with a Learning Center Initiatives consultant three times per year, establishing and monitoring goals, refining interdisciplinary curricula and working towards deepening the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards.
- Teacher teams utilize the school-created “Analysis of Student Work Protocol” that has been revised to align with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This protocol requires presenting teachers to articulate the skills necessary for each task, select three students performing at each level representative of the class-wide trends, and identify the learning needs of the selected students, in order to plan targeted instruction, including specific strategies to address the needs of English Language Learners and students with disabilities. During teacher team meetings this process is repeated as each teacher presents her/his sample of student response-writing, student problem-solving or performance-based assessment.
- Positively and directly correlated with the increase in teacher instructional capacity, is the increase in student achievement. Student achievement data reflect that students performing at level 3 or 4 in English Language Arts increased by 3% between 2013 and 2014. In math students performing at level 3 or 4 increased by 2% between 2013 and 2014. Overall, student achievement metrics exceeded the target in all areas.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

While teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and the Danielson Framework, reflecting the school's articulated beliefs about how students learn best, and teaching strategies emphasize higher-order thinking skills for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, there are missed opportunities to further push all students' thinking in a few classrooms.

Impact

Across classrooms, various teaching strategies provide multiple entry points that engage learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, in challenging tasks. Teachers' focus on higher level questioning promotes high level thinking by all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms observed teaching strategies included direct instruction/ modeling, active engagement, turn and talk, guided small-group work and independent small-group, work which engaged students in the school wide focus, "Using questioning and discussion techniques to raise the bar on questioning requiring text evidence."
- Teachers engaged students in making inferences from texts via high level questioning, i.e. "What is a theme within the story?" and "How does the author support the main idea in the story?" Students provided textual evidence for their divergent responses.
- Peer to peer partnerships supported the engagement and progress of English Language Learners and students with disabilities, as teachers designated mixed-ability level partners who engaged each other in discussions and other related classroom tasks.
- Teachers implement the gradual release of responsibility for learning, to students, using the, "To, With, By" paradigm of a workshop model approach. However, highly differentiated tasks, including extensions of curricula for advanced learners, or additional scaffolds for the most struggling learners, were not evident in some classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Standards and emphasize the instructional shifts. Coherent curricula and academic tasks reflect emphasis on rigorous learning activities and demonstration of higher order thinking by all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

School wide collaborative planning has enhanced the coherence and alignment of the interdisciplinary curricula to Common Core and other content standards. Students gain greater conceptualization of relationships and concepts through the design of highly demanding tasks across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- According to the principal, consultants from Learning Center Initiatives have assisted teacher teams in creating, revising and refining CCLS-aligned ELA units that integrate science and social studies and incorporate the instructional shifts.
- Through the Backwards Design model, teacher teams strategically develop interdisciplinary units that springboard from the essential question and comprise mini-lessons, activities, guided questions, reflection questions, assessment options, CCLS-aligned rubrics and embedded academic vocabulary. The grade 4 Family Unit, for example, was developed as a literature based unit that incorporated video-clips of student authors' families, short texts, student essays and three-dimensional displays. Students gathered data using varied media, modalities and techniques such as reading, interviewing, photographing, collaging, video-taping and audio-recording. This interdisciplinary ethnographic unit emerged from the essential question, "What makes an ideal family?"
- Lesson plans for math instruction list tools and manipulatives such as varied counters, tens frames, place value mats, and coins, for students throughout the grades to use as they engage in higher order thinking activities, such as exploring number sense and multiple methods for problem-solving.
- The principal stated that the school selected *Go Math* as the math curriculum because it has embedded vertical coherence and is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. The curriculum is modified by teacher teams to adapt to the standards and the needs of the students. The *Go Math* curriculum is supplemented by *Teacher Created Materials* in the areas of multiplication and division.

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers create curricula-aligned rubrics and checklists that clearly illustrate the criteria for student mastery and provide students with actionable and meaningful feedback. The use of common assessments illuminates student progress and assists teachers in tailoring the curriculum for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

Student-friendly rubrics facilitate students' understanding of the rubrics and allow students to see their progress. The administration of common assessments provides a common lens and language for discussing student progress and drives curricula and instructional adjustments that support growing mastery of learning targets for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers revise early-grade writing rubrics to include illustrations of the mastered criteria related to curricula at each level of the gradient. Teachers provide students with student-friendly checklists that reflect the criteria for level 3 – meeting standards.
- The school has created a “Writing Analysis Protocol” to provide a common lens to assist grade teams in analysis of student writing samples. Grade teams use data from this protocol to inform instructional decisions and develop scaffolds for English Language Learners and students with disabilities, for whom data on class profiles show ongoing improvement in literacy skills development.
- Narrative feedback customizes rubric-aligned support for individual students. For example, student work products bear posted notes containing detailed rubric-aligned feedback from teachers, with actionable next steps. Students respond to feedback in writing, acknowledging understanding of their levels of mastery of goals and next steps towards improvement.
- The school administers Developmental Reading Assessments to track student progress in reading. Imagen Learning technology-based assessment is used school wide to track the progress of English Language Learners and students who are performing in the lowest 3rd. I-Ready technology-linked program is used to track each student's development of discrete math and reading skills throughout the school year.
- On-going formative and summative assessments guide the on-going revision and refinement of the school-created interdisciplinary units which strategically incorporate literacy based tasks that help to strengthen student performance across content areas.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training and accountability systems linked to the attainment of the expectations. Families receive ongoing feedback from teachers to further their understanding of student progress towards expectations set for them.

Impact

Teachers are aware of the administration's expectations for performance as aligned to the Danielson Framework. Teacher and principal feedback support parents in helping their children to succeed in school.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal and assistant principals implement a system of formal and informal observations which they use to hold teachers accountable for instructional expectations. Teacher efficacy and progress towards professional goals are monitored via the observations, one to one conferences with each teacher and regular examination of student work products, with timely and actionable feedback provided to all teachers by school leaders.
- School leaders are conducting a book study of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, fortifying teacher understanding of the criteria and expectations for "best practice".
- Parents are consistently informed of student progress through the "I-Ready" technology-linked platform and the "Class Dojo" on-line platform. The school also provides home licenses for the "Razz-Kids" instructional program, allowing families to help provide students with extra support in literacy.
- Special meetings are held monthly to inform parents of school wide initiatives and parents are invited to informally meet with the principal and/or teachers every Tuesday to discuss their children's progress in meeting or exceeding learning goals and expectations.