



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Intermediate School 254**

**Junior High-Intermediate-Middle School X254**

**2452 Washington Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10458**

**Principal: Alexis Marrero**

**Date of review: January 26, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Melodie Mashel**

## The School Context

I.S. 254 is an intermediate school with 500 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 20% Black, 76% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 33% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. 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>Developing</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>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</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>Celebration</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations to staff using Danielson's Framework for Teaching. High expectations are conveyed to families through a variety of systems.

### Impact

The school's systems and structures message high expectations to all constituents and hold stakeholders accountable, ensuring an increase in student achievement levels that prepares them for a college and career path.

### Supporting Evidence

- Frequent classroom observations and weekly professional learning sessions as well as school leaders' participation in teacher team meetings ensure staff is held accountable for meeting expectations that elevates teacher practice. In addition, the school leader provides teachers with actionable feedback via one to one conversations. A review of the principal's Advance feedback notes reveals recommendations made such as; ensure the use of task specific rubrics so student may raise the level of their work and incorporate student discussion opportunities in daily lessons.
- Staff is apprised of the school's high expectations via morning announcements, "On the Same Page" weekly meetings, weekly bulletins, weekly professional learning sessions and administrative and instructional cabinet meetings.
- The school's use of Skedula and Pupil path serve as an ongoing messaging system for parents and students about student academic and personal growth. Parents expressed the principal is highly visible, maintains an open door policy and that they are kept informed of student progress every Tuesday when teachers and parents connect during conferences or via phone.
- The school's Town Hall meeting at the beginning of the year serves to inform parents of the school's expectations. Career fairs, high school Fairs, college visits, as well as guidance meetings with groups of students and parents prepare students and families for the next levels. Former students return to address graduating students, share their high school experiences, and reveal strategies to students as to how to best prepare for the transition to high school.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

### Findings

Teaching practices aligned to Danielson's Framework for Teaching are surfacing. The use of strategies that engage all students in learning and high quality work varies across classrooms.

### Impact

As a result of the inconsistent alignment of teaching practices to the Danielson Framework, there are missed opportunities for teachers to elevate their practice and ensure that all students produce meaningful work that promotes high level thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- Informed by Danielson's Framework for teaching and the instructional shifts, school leaders believe students learn best by doing, with appropriate scaffolding and supports, students should engage in challenging work that permits them to engage in a productive struggle. In some classrooms visited, students participated in group tasks that elevated student thinking. For example, in a seventh grade native language arts class, students read a variety of leveled texts, interpreted historical quotes and cited specific evidence offering opinions on whether it was advantageous for the United States to purchase Louisiana. However, in other classrooms, lessons were teacher dominated.
- The use of questioning techniques that are informed by Danielson's Framework for Teaching that are high level and promote student thinking is not yet a fully embedded practice. For example, in a seventh grade English language arts class, students were asked, "does anyone know what an inference is?" requiring a choral response and eliciting basic recall. However, in a sixth grade English language arts class, students were required to respond to the question "why would the author make this illusion of one character and not another?"
- In some classrooms, students were grouped strategically to support English language learners and students with disabilities to turn and talk about their work. In a self-contained special education class, students were provided with leveled text to provide them with support in accessing the curricular content.
- While teachers have embraced Expeditionary Learning units of study in English language arts and students are expected to read informational text and produce written arguments with evidence to support claims, challenging tasks leading to the production of quality student work is not yet evident across content subjects. For example, in an eighth grade social studies class, students were expected to explore the question, "What social, political and economic impact developed through the immigrant and American exchange?" However, to respond to the question, students referred solely to their social studies textbook.

## Additional Findings

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

School leaders and staff are beginning to incorporate the instructional shifts and align the school's curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards. Refining curriculum is an emerging practice.

### Impact

The alignment of curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards has not yet yielded a coherent curriculum across grades and disciplines, thus hindering all students including English Language Learners and students with disabilities from engaging in well-planned rigorous tasks that prepare students for college and career.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school adopted Expeditionary Learning as the Common Core aligned curricula resource for English language arts. A review of the school's English language arts units reveal the units embed reading, writing, language, listening and speaking standards. In addition, units focus on reading informational text and writing to support claims with text evidence. However, a review of science and social studies units demonstrate the school is beginning to develop a coherent curriculum in the content areas.
- Lesson plans in math address the Common Core. While the Depth of Knowledge wheel was displayed across classrooms, a review of lesson plans demonstrates that only in some written plans were students required to complete rigorous tasks. For example, an eighth grade math lesson plan specifically addressed student expected outcomes and required students to prove the point of intersection as the solution to the system of equations. Review of a social studies lesson revealed, students were simply required to define specific terms such as; pull and push factors.
- While teachers meet to review student work, revisions to unit lessons was evident in some plans. For example, a seventh grade English language arts unit revealed curricula revisions for students with disabilities by embedding the use of leveled text and a variety of graphic organizers

**Findings**

The use of common assessments to monitor student progress is starting to materialize. Teachers are beginning to employ checks for understanding and rubrics to assess student growth toward the Common Core Learning Standards.

**Impact**

Results of assessments, including checks for understanding and student self-assessment are inconsistently used to make curricular and instructional adjustments.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school uses Degrees of Reading Power to assess student performance and progress in reading. Baselines, midlines, and end line assessments are used in math. The school leader has recently introduced Skedula as a unified system for tracking student progress.
- The strategic analysis of New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test information is beginning to be used as a source to monitor the progress of English language learners (ELLs) acquisition of communication skills. The school has demonstrated minimal progress towards standards for ELLs.
- A review of lessons plans reveals some classes use exit slips to assess student progress. Teacher and student use of task specific rubrics to assess the quality of student work is not yet a -embedded practice. Students expressed that they knew the quality of their work was good because their teacher informed them. One student shared that the use of a rubric supported the student in improving the quality of the work.
- Visits to classrooms reveal an inconsistent use of checks for understanding. For example, in a seventh grade integrated co - teaching English language arts class students raised differentiated cards as a system to indicate their understanding of content taught. However, adjustments to address student misconceptions were not addressed.

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

Teacher teams engage in inquiry based professional collaborations. Teachers participate in making decisions about lessons, curricula and instructional practices.

### **Impact**

Teachers consistently participate in collaborative learning and structured inquiry that elevates the quality of teacher practice builds community and promotes teacher leadership that affect the learning across the school.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers consistently participate in collaborative learning and structured inquiry that elevates the quality of teacher practice builds community and promotes teacher leadership that affect the learning across the school.
- The school's Pedagogical Learning Committee meets weekly to reflect on their practices and gain a deeper understanding of Danielson's Framework competencies. For example, using a classroom inter-visitation protocol adapted from the NYCDOE Handbook for Professional Learning, members of the Pedagogical Learning Committee met to discuss their observations from classroom visits. The focus of classroom visits was on using questioning and discussion techniques. Teachers shared their findings and discussed possible strategies to elevate the level of their questions and used the Depth of Knowledge rubric to embed high level questions into the curriculum.
- Teachers expressed that they provide input about teacher practice that works. For example, teachers shared that they identify and implement discussion techniques that elevate the level of student discourse and determined that high level questions sparks student conversations.
- Teachers attend professional development sessions on a regular basis around such topics: Middle School Quality Initiative, the implementation of Word Generation and the use of English language learner instructional strategies. Teachers turnkey the content of the workshops attended at teacher team meetings and professional development sessions.