

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Fairmont Neighborhood School**

**Elementary School X314**

**1550 Vyse Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10460**

**Principal: Scott Wolfson**

**Date of review: May 14, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Rafaela Espinal**

## The School Context

Fairmont Neighborhood School is an elementary school with 265 students from grade Pre-K through grade 3. The school population comprises 38% Black, 60% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 1% 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 91.5%.

## 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>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>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>Developing</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

Teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place to build teacher leadership capacity.

### Impact

Structured teacher team collaboration supports teachers' professional learning, lead to empower teachers to take leadership roles in the school community, and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal ensures that the work of teacher teams strengthens the instructional capacity of teachers by creating opportunities for teachers to work together. Teachers learn planning skills from each other and are encouraged to share instructional strategies and problem solve using data to drive the discussions. For example, when kindergarten teachers noticed that children were deficient in domain specific vocabulary, they devised an inquiry question to investigate this topic and to develop strategies to address the gap in the Technical Education Research Centers (TERC) investigation that supplements Go Math.
- Footprints of the work lives in the systematized process evident in the Google docs and the self- selected inquiry work based on needs driven by analyzing student work (i.e. vocabulary development). As observed, in order to ensure effective level of collaboration, grade teams upload meeting minutes and agendas to Google drive during each meeting. Assessment data is also uploaded. Data collection has been adjusted based on feedback from grade teams which led to revising the 4-week cycle to a 6 week cycle. A data specialist monitors data collection and ensures the timely upload of information. Teachers have access to current student outcomes and are able to make instructional decision to address students' instructional needs.
- As part of the principal's vision to build capacity within his instructional team, the school has grade team leaders for each grade. The grade team leaders communicate instructional expectations to their team members. In addition, teachers are working within their strengths on various projects toward school goals. For example, teachers have successfully applied for projects like Donor's Choose, Music and the Brain, and Heavenly productions donation bags with supplies and books. The school has additional resources to support students based on these teacher leadership initiatives
- Distributive leadership structures are in place. Teachers expressed that they have opportunities for communication, have a voice in key decisions, and appreciate the open door policy. Teachers work with the principal, the instructional coach, the assistant principal, and grade leaders to share their thinking.

## Area of Focus

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

Pedagogical practices provide inconsistent instructional supports, including multiple entry points, and other strategies to engage all learners in rigorous tasks and discussions.

### Impact

Across classrooms, teaching practices led students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs), to uneven levels of engagement in tasks relative to demonstrating higher order thinking skills and meaningful work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal believes that students should engage in activities that are both cognitively challenging and accessible. In order to achieve this belief, he shared that teachers' must plan strategically; provide opportunities for independent practice and collaboration with the aim of building students' independence, and initiative through questioning and discussion techniques. These beliefs were not consistently reflected across all classrooms, which lead to uneven levels of student engagement.
- To build teacher capacity so that they promote rigorous high-level discussions and tasks, teachers are provided with professional development from external consultants (Teachers College and Metamorphosis) as well as through cooperative teacher led grade meetings. Additionally, teachers' professional learning is supported in partnership with Turnaround for Children in which classroom structures are designed so that teachers have opportunities to create classroom environments in which rigorous and high level discussions can take place. However, workshop style teaching was not evident across classrooms and certain structures were not in place. For example, teachers lagged in their introduction of the teaching point in the mini lessons and delayed the active engagement time of the lessons.
- In a few classes observed, the instruction was teacher-centered and provided insufficient time for all students, including ELLs and SWDs, with time on task. The teachers and other adults in the room used the instructional time to review lesson expectations, to clarify and provide examples. Students spent very little time applying, synthesizing information and evaluating the skills taught. There were missed opportunities for student-to-student engagement, collaboration, or time on task. For example, in a lower grade math lesson two separate teachers working with two different groups repeated, "You pick a card and then you decide who has the highest number." There was no follow up for students to explain their thinking and share how they know which partner has a higher number.
- While some teachers implemented grouping and attempted to scaffold for groups of learners, trends in most classrooms demonstrated inadequate use of effective strategies and lack of differentiated tasks. For example, in most lessons observed, students were given the same graphic organizers as a whole class participation tool rather than used as scaffolds targeted to support specific student needs. One Social Studies unit across the third grade displayed inconsistent student work products and unevenness of learning targets that varied from a focus on the arts to a focus on writing.
- The rigor in questioning was uneven across classrooms and there was a mix of questions posed to promote student thinking including Webb's Depth of Knowledge level 1 recall questions. Examples included, "What is a suspect? What do you see? Who has more?" Students were not able to engage in critical thinking activities that will help them further their learning targets. Discussions were teacher to student rather than student to student.

## Additional Findings

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

The school ensures that curricula are Common Core Learning Standards aligned and tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills and are planned to engage all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and special education students in all subjects.

### Impact

The curricula are designed so that student learning is coherent, promotes college and career readiness and emphasizes student thinking across grades and subjects.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal in collaboration with the instructional team, decided to implement curricula aligned to Common Core Learning Standards to promote coherence and alignment around the instructional shifts which is supportive of children's working on rigorous task, while supporting children's development toward independence. Additionally, the instructional team partners with Teacher's College, because of their focus on text-based evidence, writing, and on providing scaffolding to support children as they move toward grade level and increasingly complex texts. In addition, the principal stated that the refinement of academic tasks to provide all students with access to the Common Core Learning Standards is the key lever to developing the instructional core at the school.
- Teachers across the school use curriculum programs that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards which provide grade level text, and performance tasks/activities that require students to apply, evaluate and analyze information. For example, teacher generated units of study based upon the NYC scope and Sequence in science and social studies. Teacher generated unit of study in science at each grade level created under advisement from Heidi Hayes Jacobs and inserted into Rubicon Atlas.
- Unit refinements informed by student work prompted the school to make curricula modifications. For example, first grade teachers revised student groups when they assessed that some were not mastering specific concepts. They modified tasks to include the use of more manipulatives to support children's development and understanding of the task, and embedded questions that asked students to discuss what they noticed.
- The review of lesson plans revealed that lesson planning in most classes reflected multiple entry points, such as tiered math problems, student choice in text materials, purposeful grouping and an outline of academic vocabulary. For example, an English lesson plan incorporates small group modeling for ELLs including visuals to develop reading strategies to help them know the characters in their books.
- Teachers reported that they are currently working with Teachers College staff developers to examine and refine current assessment tools and tasks to deepen alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Examples of student tasks were observed such as responding to questions using text base evidence, writing opinion pieces on topics or texts, engagement in student to student discussions, in groups, or teacher led. For example, a third grade unit of study indicates writing activities including descriptive detail and literary devices, such as dialogue, point of view, and figurative language.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Core content area teacher teams have collaboratively developed common periodic and summative assessments and rubrics aligned with the school's curricula, and use the resulting data from student work analysis to plan for adjustments to instruction at the teacher team and classroom levels.

### Impact

Teacher growth in effectively analyzing data to identify gaps in learning informs curricula and instructional adjustments, to provide a variety of learners with support for student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal ensures that common assessments are aligned to instructional goals by providing grade teams opportunities to cooperatively develop common grade assessments and assessment schedules. Additionally, the instructional team has created a school assessment calendar, for which all grade teams are responsible. The data specialist reviews class and individual student data and compiles graphs so that the instructional team can review the assessment data to determine whether individual students or student groups are making progress toward school goals. Furthermore, assessment data is shared with grade teams and strategies are devised to adjust the curriculum to address students' needs.
- Student work displayed on the hallway and classroom bulletin boards included task descriptions, assessment results, and evaluation rubrics. Teachers wrote rubric-based comments, but students would benefit from more explicit actionable next steps. For example, across classrooms visited, a review of student portfolios revealed that most student work products had specific feedback such as, "I enjoyed reading your story about your feelings. Next time let's use sequence words when writing our stories across pages." Teachers use child friendly rubrics that are aligned to the units of study. For example, a rubric for information writing included a student self-assessment and teacher rating on "writing an engaging beginning and capturing the reader's attention," while an opinion piece asked "I stated my opinion and at least one reason why." These are aligned to the school's writing curriculum and provide feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement.
- Students reported that most of their teachers use rubrics to help them understand the quality of written work and projects they work on in their lessons. The feedback they receive helps them to improve their work and keeps them focused on getting the highest rating. Some students mentioned that teachers meet with them individually to go over their assessments and give them personal verbal feedback that helps them identify their next learning targets. For example, a kindergarten grade student mentioned that she uses the checklist to help her learn what she needs for first grade. She stated that in writing she is adding dialogue to her writing.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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**Findings**

The school is in the process of extending and expanding communication and collaboration with parents to increase their capacity to assist in their child’s learning. Feedback clarity is beginning to help prepare students for the next level.

**Impact**

The culture for setting high expectations is not yet providing students or families the necessary supports to achieve those expectations.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The principal reported that school leaders communicate high expectations to the staff through observations, based on Danielson’s Framework for Teaching and that all the school’s constituents are using effective support structures to assist staff, students, and families in meeting those expectations. However, parents were not clear on school-wide goals and expectations for their children and how the school is getting their children ready for the next grade. During the teacher interviews, many teachers could not articulate the connection between the schools instructional goals and the connection to the path for college and career readiness.
- The principal issues weekly newsletter, features updates, instructional tips, school-wide highlights, and important upcoming events, as well as response to intervention news, updates from coaches, and grade team information to communicate high expectations. The parent coordinator’s monthly bi-lingual newsletter publicizes parent workshops and events designed to elevate the level of parental engagement. However, these documents are just beginning to inform parents of the school’s instructional expectations.
- In order to secure smooth transition, the school community participates in structured protocols to ensure that students have a clear understanding of the expectations for the next grade level. For example, at the end of the school year, students will meet with their next-year’s teachers to discuss, curriculum and classroom procedures for next year as well as to discuss teacher expectations. In these sessions, students are encouraged to share their questions and concerns with their new teachers. However, the school still working in involving families in this process.
- Although parents shared that the school promotes several initiatives to engage them in school workshop activities such as, attendance awareness, domestic violence, home & school connection, stress management, parent conference preparation, Individualized Education Program (IEP) awareness, and Spanish class. During the parent interview, some parents were unclear of the vision and goals of the school and they were not aware of the instructional expectations of the grade for their individual children. A level of detail and clarity is lacking for teachers to articulate to parents and students regarding academic progress towards meeting levels of expectations.