



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Lab School for Children

Elementary- Middle School X315

**2246 Jerome Avenue
Bronx
NY 10453**

Principal: Gaby Flores

**Date of review: May 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Marion Wilson**

The School Context

The Lab School for Children is an elementary and middle school with 266 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 17% Black, 80% Hispanic, 3% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 24% 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 94.5%.

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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

**3.4 High
Expectations**

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness, and successfully partner with families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance supports.

Impact

Families and students are aware of the high expectations for student progress, and students continue to make significant improvements on class work assignments and state exams and are able to work to their highest level of performance.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides parents with flexible schedules in order to attend various workshops beyond classroom visits in the morning, afternoon, or in the evening. Workshops from the Parent Calendar include the following titles, *Digging Deeper into the Common Core Learning Standards*, *Special Education Reform*, *English as Second Language Strategies to Use at Home* for their large Spanish speaking parent population. The school also scheduled additional individual meeting time with all parents from September through early November to discuss action plans for ways that parents can support their child with goals at home. Some conferences are led by the students themselves in order to have parents hear directly from their children.
- The administrative team established systems to facilitate ongoing communication to parents and have successfully implemented the Parents as Partners program at the school. Letters are sent home electronically and parents are able to respond and communicate directly with teachers about individual student concerns. Parents are responsible for monitoring their children's homework and also offer specific feedback to teachers to help improve student performance and help in the crafting and planning of classroom lessons.
- The guidance team, which includes the guidance counselor, youth development coordinator and school-based support team help to lead lessons on college and career readiness assemblies and developing habits of mind, such as grit and self-discipline that promote success for students. In addition, personal habits of self-regulation are continuously messaged to students through the use of school-wide behavior matrixes.
- Feedback to students is provided informally on a frequent basis through conferences with the teachers. In addition, student-friendly checklists for all subject areas have been developed to clearly establish criteria for exemplary, high-quality standards of work, discussion, and performance. Students are aware of their strengths, next steps for growth, and are actively involved in reflection, peer and self-assessment of their work. For example, in the student meeting, one third grade student shared, "I wrote an opinion essay about the book *Life of Pi*, and after reading the sentence stem comments to improve my writing so it helped me to get a level 3 on my final essay."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While teaching practices are aligned to the school-wide beliefs of articulating the objectives and providing supports for all students, high levels of student thinking and participation were not evidence across all classrooms.

Impact

Across classrooms teachers tier the tasks for students to ensure access, however in some classrooms students there were missed opportunities for students to demonstrate high levels of ownership of learning as evidenced by class discussions and student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- There are structures and routines which include collaborative protocols for students to have conversations and discussions in small groups based on open ended questions posed by the teacher. In some classes, groups were assigned students who facilitated team conversations using the Socratic Seminar protocol. Teachers mainly took notes and students led the discourse. For example, in a third grade class, students were arranged on the rug and took part in discourse around the essential question and had to cite text based evidence to support their responses while their parent watched on to capture notes about and then provide feedback to their partners.
- Students indicate that they are reading and analyzing text and writing essays and research reports. A review of student work shows coherent projects across grade levels however, some work products middle school grades reflect varying levels of challenge and critical thinking.
- Across classrooms, students worked on tasks and projects related to the school's curricula. Some classes utilized articles based on lexile levels from Newsela so students were exposed to the same concept at varying appropriately challenging levels. However, in one special needs class, some students struggled to read and respond to the text as they were not able to read the content independently. Work products reflect varying levels of cognitively challenging activities.
- Most teachers identify and generate prioritized learning objectives and teach lessons to support those objectives for students to work in small groups based on skill, strength or goals. For example, in a second grade reading classroom, students were asked to use text based evidence to answer text dependent questions from the story *Super Crocodile*. Students read independently at first and then worked to answer the questions in a group. However, students who understood the text were not allowed to veer away and formulate their own questions which were not literal based.

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 Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. In addition, 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

School-wide coherence in curricula development and revision, curricula across grades and content areas ensures that all learners, including English language learner and students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking and promote college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has clearly defined criteria for what it means to exit a grade level and to attain the enduring understandings and key skills that ensure success in college and career. The school's curricula and ancillary resources have been strategically and purposefully utilized, updated, revised, and supplemented for all grades. In addition, upon review of unit plans and maps and after analyzing gaps for math, the school researched and redesigned curricula maps incorporating different resources to support mathematics instruction for the elementary and middle schools, respectively.
- School leaders and teachers can articulate how curricula, across and within grade levels, are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and scaffold student success to promote college and career readiness for all students in grades kindergarten to 8. For example, the curricula were revised to incorporate a significant increase in the amount of opportunities students had to engage in student-to-student discussion and afterwards required to complete a writing response related to literature previously read. This is evident in unit plans and curricula maps. For example, students across grades were read to and then, responding to a prompt, had to discuss with partners and then respond to literature by writing in their journals about a book entitled, *Not Norman*, a story about a goldfish. Each writing prompt became increasingly demanding depending on the student's performance and grade level. Exemplars of the expectations for each grade were displayed throughout the building.
- Rigorous habits and higher order skills, such as those that require students to create their own meaning, integrate skills into processes, and use what they have learned to solve real world problems, are identified and embedded coherently across grades and subjects. For example, in the fifth grade Social Studies map, tasks were developed to have students complete graphic organizers about the South American economy with subtopics related to increasingly complex and various articles and text related to the subject based on the New York City Social Studies Scope and Sequence.
- Habits of mind are evident across classrooms and can be seen embedded in tasks, such as word problems requiring students to persist, and in questioning where students have to apply past working knowledge to new situations in order to solve problems and think interdependently to complete classroom activities.

Findings

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

Impact

High quality assessment practices provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Additionally, teachers continue to find new ways to make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- A variety of feedback to students, from both teachers and peers, is accurate, specific, and timely, advancing learning as evidenced by students' articulation of checklists and rubrics showing progression based on lesson target and where they fell on this continuum. Students articulated incorporating self-reflection, peer feedback and teacher feedback as they improved their work and made progress.
- Teachers and administrators articulate coherent reasons for assessment choices. Assessments are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards across content curricula. These choices deliver a range of data, some daily, some monthly, and some quarterly, to sustain collaborative inquiry and continuously improve instruction. The school uses running records, daily conferences with students, collection of student work samples, performance assessments, end of unit assessments, teacher-created assessments, as well as rubrics and checklists to continue their efforts to provide a laser-like focus on determining student mastery of subjects.
- Teacher monitoring of student understanding during lessons is visibly active and continuous. Teachers were observed "taking the pulse" of the class, and making frequent use of strategies such as questioning for explanation, thumbs up and down, stop and jots, parking lot post its, dry erase slates, and written exit slips. These strategies are used by teachers to gather information about individual and groups of students understanding and learning trends. In turn, teachers identify the specific needs of all students to modify instruction and accelerate progress for those who need it or provide additional support for others.
- Students are actively involved in the collection of information from assessments, and provide input. Students keep journals, notes, and portfolios, and track their work using student-friendly checklists for projects, homework assignments, and informal as well as formal exams. Students consistently self/peer-assess against the assessment criteria (rubrics and checklists), and monitor their understanding and progress either by taking initiative or as a result of tasks set by the teacher. Students are aware of their next learning steps, and can articulate clearly what they need to do and will do to make improvements.

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 structured professional collaborations using an inquiry approach that focuses on improved student achievement for all learners. Additionally, embedded leadership structures provide a means for teachers to make key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact

Teacher teams function at a high level of collaboration and cooperation resulting in improved teaching practices across the school with highly effective practices displayed. In addition, teachers are able to make individual classroom level decisions which affect student learning causing even greater student progress towards goals.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers collaborate in professional teams where they develop and implement school wide instructional practices, embedding Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts to continuously promote improved academic achievement for all learners. Teachers have opportunities to engage in inquiry work, curricula development or other professional activities. For example, during the math team meeting, teachers were utilizing a looking at student work protocol to examine a teacher created common assessment on tasks requiring students to explain the relationship between variables and patterns in algebraic equations. The results of the work products also led to modifications to the math curriculum plan.
- To ensure extension of student thinking, teachers engage in inquiry-based collaborations that meet twice a week to analyze the integration and collected responses from Think-Pair-Share activities and how these strategies help to improve student thinking across classrooms. These meetings have significantly impacted the quality of student work for all students including subgroups. Understanding the gap in performance tasks, teachers engage in work to revise and modify existing tasks to better suit the needs of their varied learners.
- School leaders and teachers offer specific and clear examples of teacher leadership that illustrate how teachers and teacher leaders play a vital role in school-level decision-making. For example, the school online resources to post minutes and student work from teams in an effort to help them reflect on their practice and achievement. The website contains voluntary videotaped lessons where teachers can discuss best practices or plans for improvement outside of the administrative process.
- Administrators and teachers are able to identify distributed leadership structures that are deeply-rooted in the school's day to day operations and articulate how they serve as a conduit for teacher input in strategic decisions build capacity and that affect student achievement. All teachers are part of one core grade level team and also related departmental/subject area teams, including but not limited to the math team, science team, social studies team, literacy team or professional development team. Using the professional learning guide, teams assess and evaluate their own professional learning and make self-directed revisions as necessary.