



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Samara Community School

Elementary School X458

**1550 Vyse Avenue
Bronx
NY 10460**

Principal: Danielle Derrig

**Date of review: May 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Rafaela Espinal**

The School Context

Samara Community School is an elementary school with 68 students from pre-kindergarten through kindergarten. The school population comprises 28% Black, and 72% Hispanic students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.0%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	Proficient
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
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Findings

The principal consistently communicates high expectations to all staff and provides training aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The principal and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with families.

Impact

There is mutual accountability of student success by all stake holders. These best practices have also resulted in high levels of professionalism, quality instruction, and effective communication around academic, social, and behavioral expectations for students resulting in improved student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- The rigorous curriculum that the principal and teachers have created holds students and teachers to very high academic expectations. Across the school these high expectations are noticed in teacher practice and school culture. The principal uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching to observe teachers via cycles of regular observation and specific, actionable feedback. All teachers know that the practice of observation, feedback, next steps, and follow up structures that ensure that teachers are aware of the school's high expectations. In addition, the entire Samara School Community team is expected to work hard and constantly increase the expectations as students are prepared for the next level.
- The school team works diligently to create an environment of shared accountability among the staff. For example, all faculty members participated in a week-long summer introductory professional development. In addition, Monday professional development is structured around a student's case study which is followed by action planning, data analysis, and the creation of individualized coaching plans for identified teachers' continued growth.
- Parents shared that they are engaged in a series of grade specific meetings to deepen their understanding of the Common Core Learning Standards. For example, parent trainings during progress report time include understanding progress benchmarks, reading the progress report, and how to help their child at home. The school conducts family interviews in kindergarten so parents feel welcome and experience the child's curriculum. In conferences with parents, data is shared with next steps for students. Family nights and monthly theme-based evenings provide opportunities to build a sense of community. As a result of these approaches to engage parents, the levels of collaboration and support among all school stakeholders translates into a school with high commitment and expectations at all levels
- This is a dual language school where all students strive to learn academically in both English and Spanish. In kindergarten, children learn in a side-by-side model, alternating days between the English teacher and Spanish teacher. In pre-kindergarten, children alternate languages within a self-contained classroom. All teachers are licensed bilingual teachers. The goal of the program is for students to become bi-literate and multi-cultural.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments that are aligned to the curriculum. Teachers monitor student outcomes using ongoing assessments and checks for understanding, but are not yet consistently providing clear next learning steps to students.

Impact

The students' progress is consistently analyzed across all grades resulting in curricular and instructional adjustments. However, meaningful feedback is not always shared with all students so that they are aware of the steps they need to take to make progress towards learning targets.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has established systems for both ongoing formative assessment data review and summative benchmark data collection and review throughout the year. Systems used in the classroom to collect ongoing assessment data include, photos, checklists, record of book levels, conferring notes, and data binders. For example, teachers submit assessment data four times a year to the school data system, which is then analyzed during planning time. The school is working to create an online system for teachers to upload curriculum units and plans, benchmark assessment data, and student performance results. As a result, teachers make effective instructional adjustments to meet all students' learning needs. However, these are not yet consistently shared with individual students in their work products or conferences so that they are aware of their progress towards mastery.
- There are also classroom practices in place to monitor assessment data and make adjustments to curriculum and instruction. For example, there are anchor texts and writing pieces used in instruction. The teachers and principal norm at the end of each unit to discuss expectations and review writing pieces using a common rubric. On-demand writing assessments are used to plan for unit instruction, establish strategy groups, and plan for individual student conferences. Benchmark assessments for primary reading progress and independent reading levels are gathered in September, November, March, and May. Baseline NYC Performance Assessments for Math are used to assess student performance in math and measure movement towards end-of-year expectations. These baselines are administered in the beginning of the year, mid-year, and at year-end. Although the majority of students are making progress to meet their learning needs as a result of the established assessment practices, students do not yet consistently receive ongoing meaningful feedback.
- While visiting classrooms, checks for understanding were evident in most classrooms. In one out of three classes visited, real-time effective adjustments were made. For example, teachers implemented scaffolding questions from basic to complex and used whiteboards, thumb-o-meters, and regrouped the students based on their responses. However, when students were left to work independently they were not always aware of their next learning step based on their responses to the checks for understanding.
- Teachers have created rubrics that are discussed with all students across subjects throughout the curriculum and particularly in writing. Students were observed using rubrics during class to self-assess and provide their peers feedback on writing.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The principal and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts using student work and data to target planning for individual and groups of students.

Impact

As a result of curricular decisions, there is coherence across grades and subject areas and all students have access to curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal and faculty designed a curriculum map and unit plans for literacy, math, and content-area studies were created by the teacher-team in the summer of 2014. The school adopted and uses the following research-based and Common Core Learning Standards aligned curricula for the major content areas. For example, Teacher's College Reading and Writing Workshop in Literacy, TERC investigations in math and thematic studies planned from grade-level standards provided by the NY state and NYC Department of Education scope and sequence. These include enrichment through cultural institution connections in social studies and science.
- All students experience units of study in English language arts (ELA) and math aligned to the Common Core for the grade. The instructional shifts are embedded in both math and ELA curricula. A unique feature of the school is the use of field trips and experiential learning to support vocabulary development in two languages, content knowledge, and higher-order thinking skills. All curricula is planned, shared, and reviewed in grade-level teams. All teachers use Monday professional development time to meet with their grade team to refine curriculum plans to meet individual needs based on assessment and observation data.
- Ongoing supervisory visits serve as a lens to examine not only teacher pedagogy, but implementation of curriculum and to share feedback with the grade-level team regarding the overall effectiveness of the curricula. Teachers have clarity around year-end learning targets and are working in collaboration to ensure their instructional plan and curricula modifications help lead all students towards mastery. For example, during a professional development meeting, after instructional walks, the team had an ongoing inquiry on how to promote discussion, critical and higher-order thinking skills across the curriculum. Instructional cohesiveness across the school helps students be aware of their progress, their role as a student, expectations, and goals for their growth.
- The review of lesson plans revealed that teachers use student data gathered from summative and formative assessments to ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and integration of instructional shifts. Teachers strategically include opportunities for students to question and pose problems, think interdependently, and be innovative. In all classrooms, students engaged in peer discussion. Lesson plans indicate purposely grouping based on students skills, language abilities and social interactions. For example in each class students engaged in peer discussion about their reading in partnerships, small differentiated leveled groups and language partnerships.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practices across the classrooms, aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, follow the school's beliefs around how students learn best and consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

As a result, all students were engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrated higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that her faculty believes that teachers are not just teachers of content, but also teachers of language. In order to learn content and language, children must be active learners through experiences. Additionally, the faculty focuses on social/emotional intelligence as a way to develop the whole child. Furthermore, there is a common understanding of effective levels of student engagement, questioning and discussion, and designing coherent instruction which is informed by the descriptors in the Danielson Framework for Teaching. These core values were reflected across classrooms, where student independence was fostered and the curricula supported multiple entry points.
- Teachers revealed that there is shared understanding and buy-in among staff on the evaluation process driven by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, staff discussions and individual conversations take place on a supervisory level with specific, individual, actionable feedback. Furthermore, staff-level conversations take place addressing the Danielson Framework for Teaching, engagement, assessment and questioning to ensure consistent movement towards greater pedagogical coherency. Also, there is a shared belief among stakeholders that students learn best in classrooms that have high visual literacy and student engagement.
- In most classrooms, teachers provided opportunities to students to think independently and work in groups to create meaning. However, in one lesson observed, all students engaged in the same learning target (sequencing a story), limiting opportunities for students who had already mastered the material to extend and take ownership of their learning.
- Across classrooms visited, students engaged in discussions, in groups and in pairs, where they were able to make connections, relate ideas within and across content and justify their choices. In a kindergarten class visited, students were using paired books with their peers and predicting across pages using reading strategies previously taught such as pointing to the words, using the picture cues, and taking a picture walk. However, in a kindergarten group observed, while teacher conferred with students the students worked in a guided reading group, but these discussions limited high levels of student thinking and ownership of learning since the teacher did most of the reading work instead of posing questions strategically.
- During classrooms visits, teachers implemented clear scaffolds and entry points, such as purposeful groupings, sentence starters, vocabulary prompts, and thinking maps, other structured planning tools, visual cues and student-centered work stations that allowed all learners with multiple ways and demonstrate their thinking. For example, in a Spanish class, English language learners were provided with sentence starters and picture cues that allowed them to engage in discussions with their peers.

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

The principal ensures that the vast majority of teachers engage in ongoing professional collaborations that promote the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. That practice is aligned to the school’s instructional goals. A distributive leadership structure engages teachers in key decisions regarding student learning.

Impact

This results in increased school-wide instructional coherence and increased achievement for all sub-groups. There is effective teacher leadership as teachers play integral roles in key decisions that affect student learning and deepen the study of the needs of individual students.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has created systems and structures in the school to ensure that across subjects, all content curriculum maps are living documents that are regularly revised during focused professional collaboration and shared school wide to elicit feedback and to build coherence across grades and subjects.
- Teacher teams meet weekly to discuss student work, analyze data to find common trends and to create curriculum maps that address the needs of all diverse learners, so that scaffolding includes the use of visuals, manipulatives and enrichment activities. For instance, when the grade teams met to collect data on student work they used the lagging skills protocol to focus on student data and inform next steps to redefine teaching strategies. Also, during these meetings, teachers adjust the curriculum maps to include more activities that would allow for visual learning, such as partner work with manipulatives and creating projects that show student understanding of how place value is used in the real world.
- Teachers shared that they have input on decisions made regarding the development of instructional resources across the grades. For example, teachers revealed that they elected to use the majority of Monday professional development time to focus on work that includes inquiry, discuss individual student cases, review student work, learn new strategies and ideas to enhance the curriculum, and planning and refining curriculum based on data and alignment of the Common Core instructional shifts.
- During common planning sessions, teachers collaborate to plan on the use of on-demand writing assessments to develop plans for individual students in writing, higher order questions that are inserted in units and lesson plans, use of shared/interactive writing to support kindergartners self-assessment/reflection of their own writing pieces, develop editing checklists with graphics supports, design rubrics aligned to tasks and to discuss and share effective strategies to support English language learners and students with disabilities. As a result of these collaborations, teaching practice has improved and students have multiple approaches to have access to the curricula.