



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 121 Nelson A. Rockefeller

K-8 School K121

**5301 20 Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Anthony Mungoli

**Date of review: May 26, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Michele Ashley**

The School Context

P.S. 121 Nelson A. Rockefeller is a K-8 school with 358 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 18% Asian, 3% Black, 42% Hispanic, and 35% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 25% students with disabilities. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.6%.

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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School Leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff provide detailed guidance and support and establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations.

Impact

Clear expectations and supports result in a culture of mutual accountability in which students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all staff through a professional learning handbook, professional learning sessions, initial one-on-one conferences, and ongoing observation and feedback. School leadership and faculty create and refine an annual theory of action statement that guides expectations and practices each year. This year's theory of action states, "If teachers share an understanding of how students learn best, then students will develop self-efficacy and ultimately be successful." School leaders and faculty use the theory of action to develop a shared understanding of how students learn best that highlights seven instructional practices. Practices include team collaboration, access to curriculum, student engagement, success criteria, and student-centered instruction. The school leader, Lead Instructional Team, and grade-level and content teachers hold each other accountable for these practices in common planning, looking at student and teacher work, in instructional rounds and in classroom inter-visitations providing feedback on targeted practices.
- School leadership shared an articulated belief that students learn best using a formative assessment process that "seeks to give students ownership over their learning by strengthening their ability to know how to improve their work". The principal provides consistent support and training to support the theory of action and a formative assessment process. Supervisors conduct ongoing formal and informal observations with a 24 to 48-hour feedback cycle and provide training in the school's six interrelated elements of the formative assessment process which include: shared learning targets and steps for success, feedback that feeds forward, student goal setting, student self-assessment, strategic teacher questioning, and student engagement in asking effective questions. Professional learning session titles for 2015-2016 included Advancing Formative Assessment, Unpacking Key Common Core Learning Standards, and Developing Success and Assessment Criteria.
- Faculty establish a culture for learning and high expectations through systematic use of the criteria for success and the articulation of student *Steps for Success*. Teachers across grades and content areas articulate to students what the criteria for success is for each lesson and all assignments. Teachers provide students with checklists to support self-assessment and monitoring of performance. Students use success criteria, rubrics, and teacher feedback to set goals and create next steps for their own learning. A grade 7 student notes that she does well in using relevant evidence but needs to let the reader know why the information is relevant. The 2014-2015 School Quality guide reveals that 93% of the middle school students pass their core subjects and 85% of grade 8 students earn enough high school credit in grade 9 to be on track for graduation.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
--------------------	----------------	---------	------------

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and self-assessment. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals but has yet to track student progress across grades and subjects.

Impact

Assessment results are used to make effective adjustments to curricula and instruction, however, the lack of tracking across all content areas leads to missed opportunities for mastery for some students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms teachers check for understanding by asking targeted questions, distributing and collecting exit tickets, and providing students with learning targets and *Steps for Success* checklists. Teachers provide students with exemplars of level one, two, three and four performance that students use to compare their drafts to finished work products. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class the teacher asked questions to check and expand students' understanding of the setting in the story "The Hope Chest" by Karen Schwabach. After teacher prompting, students in a small group completed a graphic organizer to help them expand their description of the setting. In a math problem-solving lesson, the teacher circulated to each working group to ask questions and to determine if additional support materials were required. The teacher asked students what they thought they should be thinking about when approaching a word problem and offered some students a checklist. Students reread problems to identify the operations needed to solve the problem and used the checklist to check off each step they completed as they moved forward in the process.
- Students record learning targets in their notebooks and use reading, writing, math, and science *Steps for Success* checklists to assess their own learning. Students record learning goals, achievements, and next steps for learning in notebooks. A grade 4 science student listed learning goals achieved by the end of a lesson, which included: "I can talk about life cycles...discuss animals in the ocean habitat and how animals adapt." A grade 7 student's post-conference notes included, "I was able to answer the prompt with enough evidence to support my claim and reasons. I was able to organize my essay using four paragraphs that included an introduction, two body paragraphs and a conclusion. I need to work on some grammar issues." In a grade 2 classroom, the teacher used data from exit tickets to provide students with written next steps before they continued their work for the day. One note stated, "Read the problem at least two times and think about the operations needed to solve the problem." Student self-assessment was evident across classrooms visited.
- Teachers use common assessments in ELA and math including September baseline assessments, January benchmarks, unit assessments, *Fountas and Pinnell* running records and *GO Math!* beginning, middle, and end-of year assessments. School leaders and teachers track and record student data from these assessments and monitor for growth using an accelerated growth formula. The accelerated growth model measures growth, significant growth, accelerated growth and exceptional growth. Staff tracking for ELA and math provides a clear picture of student progress in these content areas, however, this level of tracking is not provided in other content areas.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Teachers embed rigorous habits in curricula and tasks across grades and subjects.

Impact

Coherence in curricula across grades and subjects promotes college and career readiness skills. All students engage in rigorous tasks that require them to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty utilize Common Core-aligned curricula across the core content areas. Teachers use *ReadyGen* for ELA in kindergarten through grade 2 and *Expeditionary Learning* for grades 3 through 8 and *GO Math!* across all grade levels. Teachers use *F OSS* (Full Option Science System) for science from kindergarten through grade 5 and the New York City Scope and Sequence for science in grades 6, 7, and 8. Teachers also use the New York City Scope and Sequence for social studies from kindergarten through grade 8. Staff have conducted two cycles of inquiry to unpack the Common Core Learning Standards and have aligned each unit to the appropriate grade-level and content standard. Teachers follow a school-wide format in lesson planning that supports deep understanding of content across subjects through the school-wide use of learning targets and *Steps for Success*.
- The vast majority of lessons plans include clear learning targets aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, clear explanations of what teachers and students are expected to do, and exit tickets and student checklists for the *Steps for Success*. Across subjects, unit and lesson plans align to the schools formative assessment process and provide clear plans for student engagement, the sharing of learning targets and opportunities for students to set learning goals and assess their own learning. A grade 3 science learning target states, “I can record details about my frog’s adaptation into categories by using my matrix recording form. I can effectively participate in a science talk about how my frog survives by using my classroom norms for discussion checklist.” A grade 7 science learning target states, “I can work collaboratively to analyze the physical features of rock samples, classify them into categories and determine their identity.”
- Across grades kindergarten through 8 teachers share learning targets to promote deep understanding of concepts and the purpose of learning. Learning tasks require students to engage in evidence-based conversations about text, write from sources, and apply skills and strategies to new learning. Units include plans and resources for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, to assess their own learning and demonstrate their thinking. A grade 3 ELA lesson states the following learning target for all students, “I can read and identify the main idea and key details about my frog by using the recording form and reading the text closely.” This unit includes differentiated support materials for ELLs and students with disabilities, visuals, sentence starters, chunked learning targets and a student-friendly rubric for self-assessment. This unit also extends the learning for higher functioning students encouraging these students to continue beyond the paragraph target and complete a modified essay. The level of rigor and higher-order skills observed in this unit was evident across the vast majority of lessons and units reviewed.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices, student work products and discussions are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best.

Impact

Alignment to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and professional discussions support high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader shared a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best grounded in the formative assessment process. The Lead Instructional Team developed a formative assessment theory of action and six interrelated elements of instruction that provide a coherent framework for teaching in P.S. 121 classrooms. Across the vast majority of classrooms visited, teachers and students gathered evidence of learning and set goals for improvement using learning targets and *Steps for Success* checklists. Across classrooms, teachers identified Common Core Learning Standards and clarified expected learnings for the day or the lesson. Across the vast majority of classrooms observed teachers posted or distributed the *Steps for Success* and students used these checklists to monitor their own progress.
- School leadership shared that the school is focused on improving Danielson *Framework for Teaching* components in designing coherent instruction, engaging students in learning, and using assessment in instruction. Across the vast majority of classrooms visited, teachers designed coherent plans for instruction and engaged students in learning at high levels by creating flexible learning groups, providing scaffolded activities and materials and resources, and assigning students to flexible learning groups. A Grade 5 teacher placed students in targeted work groups and assigned groups to five skill specific learning stations to review areas in need of improvement based on assessment data. Stations included activities to review line plots, volume, polygons, and the conversion of standard measurements. Teachers assessed and monitored learning by engaging students with questions, analyzing student self-assessment checklists and exit tickets, and providing students with ongoing feedback.
- Student work products and discussions provide evidence of the six elements of formative assessment which include shared learning targets and criteria for success, feedback, student goal setting, student self-assessment, strategic teacher questioning and student engagement in asking effective questions. In a social studies classroom, students asked questions regarding the civil war including, “Why doesn’t the government in the north recognize slavery as a cause of the war?” This question led to a high-level discussion about the politics of war and differing political perspectives. The vast majority of student work products reviewed evidenced the use of learning targets, *Steps for Success* checklists, scaffolds and teacher feedback as students used these resources to produce products that met identified learning targets. In an ELA lesson, an at-risk group used a “Somebody, In, Wanted, But, So” graphic organizer and teacher feedback to produce a summary paragraph that met the learning target and achieved all *Steps for Success*.

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers participate in inquiry-based structured collaborations that promote their own development and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher and student work.

Impact

Professional collaboration focused on student achievement results in school-wide instructional coherence, teachers' strengthened instructional capacity, mastery of goals for groups of students, and increased achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based, professional collaborations every Monday and in common grade-level or content planning meetings on Tuesdays. Teachers shared that the work completed in inquiry cycle one and two of unpacking the Common Core Learning Standards has developed their knowledge of content and pedagogy and deepened their understanding of learning expectations. One teacher shared that teachers have developed common expectations across the grade and can now easily identify which *Steps for Success* are needed to achieve learning targets. School leadership shared that teachers have demonstrated growth in the focus components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* as measured by formal and informal observations. Advance data from September 2015 to May 2016 shows teachers' growth in engaging students in learning, moving from 11% highly effective to 29% highly effective, and an overall rating improvement from 21% highly effective to 31% highly effective for all categories.
- Teacher inquiry includes deep analysis of the Common Core Learning Standards and the alignment of curricula and tasks to the Common Core. Staff conducts interim reflection sessions four times yearly. Teachers share responses to reflection prompts and provide evidence of impact to pedagogy and student learning. Reflection prompts include but are not limited to: "How have the changes in pedagogy and instructional practice impacted student learning and on which key standards did the team focus and why?" Teachers and school leaders share impact to teaching and learning in reflection reports. Data tracking in ELA and math reveal that 39.3% of all students have made significant to exceptional growth as measured by the accelerated growth model. In addition, students have made consistent growth on New York State (NYS) ELA and Math assessments from 2013 to 2015 with increases in performance from 26.8% to 36.9% in ELA and from 32.1% to 52% in math.
- Teacher teams analyze key elements of teacher and student work during inquiry, reflection, and instructional rounds. On mid-year reflection sheets, teachers shared that professional learning and improved practices in conferencing, questioning, discussion, and entry point planning has had a positive impact on instruction and student learning. Teachers supported their claims by citing specific improvements in pedagogy and student performance data. Teachers across the grades shared that students have improved in writing based on writing rubric scores and performance-based assessments. Student data also reveals mastery of ELA and math goals for targeted groups and increased mastery for ELLs, former ELLs, and students with disabilities on the NYS math assessment. Student achievement of Levels 3 and 4 increased from 4.3% to 20% for ELLs, from 46.2% to 70% for former ELLs, and from 8.7% to 20.6% for students with disabilities from 2013 to 2015.