



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 159 Isaac Pitkin

Elementary School K159

**2781 Pitkin Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11208**

Principal: Dr. Monica Duncan

**Date of review: December 8, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

The School Context

P.S. 159 Isaac Pitkin is an elementary school with 843 students from grade kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 32% Asian, 39% Black, 26% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 19% English Language Learners and 12% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 91.3%.

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	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Teams of teachers meet regularly to systematically analyze their instructional practices and develop strategies to improve staff and student achievement. Distributive leadership structures facilitate teacher collaboration with school leaders.

Impact

Through embedded systems and structures for teamwork, all teachers regularly reflect on and improve their capacity to deliver high quality instruction to all students. Distributed leadership results in school leaders and teacher working together to make critical decisions that improve student achievement and teacher pedagogy.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers have designated preparation periods each week for activities with peers on grade level, cluster and department teams. During the Quality Review, members of a grade 3 teacher team examined data and samples of student work linked to responses to an English Language Arts (ELA) pre- and post-test. The teachers compared the test results and each identified strengths and areas for improvement in the student work. Then they brainstormed strategies for improving student proficiency in common problem areas identified across the grade, including weakness in paragraphing and crafting responses to extended response items. Peers offered suggestions such as re-wording questions, using signal words, creating paragraph frames and engaging students in close reading of short articles, for daily practice activities related to the targeted skills.
- Teacher team activities reflect shared practices as teachers analyze data to identify strategies for adjusting instruction as needed to accelerate student mastery of Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers reported that they look at item analysis for the state exams and unit assessments to determine individual student mastery of specific standards. Using the Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional (ORID) protocol, they focus deeply on the results of assessments and their findings drive action plans for students, including remediation and enrichment activities for all students. The principal and teachers noted that teamwork continues to improve teacher pedagogy, as per Measures of Teacher Practice (MOTP) data and contributes to improvement in student achievement, as per data showing improved school wide performance on 2015 New York State ELA exam and on Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs) administered to date.
- Teacher leaders, including grade leaders, a data specialist, instructional coaches, lead teachers, a special events coordinator, dean, librarian, and members of a technology and data team, work directly with school leaders and peers in implementing school-wide protocols and developing curricula and instructional initiatives. Members of the data team are responsible for leading all staff in analyzing all the school's data and using the information to identify and address staff and students' learning needs. In addition, all teachers within teams have a designated leadership role, with rotations across cycles of weekly team activities. They create agendas and submit minutes and attendance logs from professional learning sessions, keeping all school leaders and peers informed about team activities across the school.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms teachers use multiple assessment tools and practices, aligned to curricula, to check for understanding, provide actionable feedback on student performance and engage students in self-assessment. However, teachers' assessment practices across the vast majority of classrooms do not contribute to a clear portrait of students' mastery of learning goals.

Impact

Assessment practices inform adjustments to curricula and instruction across classrooms; yet there are missed opportunities to use data from ongoing assessment to further inform adjustments that effectively meet students' learning needs and provide students with meaningful feedback that helps them understand next steps towards improving their performance.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers adopt and create Common Core-aligned rubrics, checklists and a school-wide grading policy, aligned to the curricula, to provide feedback on students' performance on tasks. Classroom bulletin boards and student folders demonstrate the use of rubrics to evaluate progress in student writing across grades, with task-specific rubrics attached to units of instruction to measure the levels of skills and content acquisition across disciplines. Although most classroom bulletin boards with student work showed rubric-based feedback to students via teacher comments with next steps for students to improve their work, some feedback seen on students' work consisted of the teacher only circling portions of the rubric, with no explicit next steps for the student to build on the level of mastery attained.
- The principal's assessment binder indicates that Fountas and Pinnell running records are administered to all students at designated periods throughout the year. Beginning and end-of-unit assessments in reading and writing linked to *ReadyGen* curricula and DRAs are also administered. Technology-linked assessments in reading and math provide additional data about levels of student achievement. *GO Math!* embedded assessments allow for the use of interactive Common Core-aligned end-of-unit assessments with *Think-Central*, an online component that provides students with additional math problems to work on, at home or in class, until they master a targeted skill or concept. This assessment tool provides feedback via in-depth reports about which concepts need to be reviewed and those that students have not yet mastered. Data boards in classrooms and a data-tracking tool seen in some teachers' data binders illustrate a Data-Driven Instruction (DDI) protocol that drives adjustments to curricula and instruction across classrooms.
- A review of student work revealed that most students use checklists and rubrics to self-assess. Further, most students at the interview stated that they assess their work with rubrics and/or checklists. In commenting on performance on a unit task, one student said, "I thought I did good but my teacher wrote 2 on my rubric and said I should add more facts." A few of the other students interviewed were not able to clearly specify what they needed to do as next steps to improve their work, based on the feedback noted on the work displayed. In addition, although teachers use tools such as white boards, exit slips, stop and jot, thumbs up or thumbs down, along with questioning and conferring with students to check for understanding, immediate follow-up on their findings was not noted in all classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and illustrate strategic integration of instructional shifts. Teachers constantly collaborate to create highly demanding curricula and tasks for all learners across grades and content areas.

Impact

A school-wide commitment to continuously deepening alignment of curricula to relevant standards results in coherently sequenced Common Core-aligned units of study, with rigorous academic tasks designed to deepen thinking and accelerate learning by all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Driven by a school-wide instructional focus on using text-based evidence to support and strengthen questioning and discussion techniques, teachers create curriculum maps and unit plans that illustrate tasks designed for enrichment and remediation for students across all ability levels. Each unit includes a culminating performance task and a Common Core-aligned rubric for assessing levels of student mastery of content and skills. Units also show that teachers front-load vocabulary and connect skills and unit goals to learning tasks that support the deepening of student thinking. This was evident in a lesson plan for pre-teaching vocabulary words such as “chromatography”, “absorption” and “chemistry”, which students would use to engage in investigating and reporting on how chemists use paper chromatography to examine pigments in water color inks. For all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, the use of visuals, sentence frames and manipulatives is embedded in lesson plans and units.
- Modules sequenced by topics and grades provide teachers with content from *ReadyGen* curricula to infuse literacy-based tasks in interdisciplinary units of curricula for grades 3-5 and from *Wonders* curricula for kindergarten through grade 2. Math curricula include the Common Core-aligned *GO Math!* program and units of study linked to teacher use of *EngageNY* resources, for additional focus on instructional shifts in math. Pacing calendars, aligned to the New York State and City scope and sequence, guide instruction in social studies and science, with Full Option Science System (FOSS) and Harcourt curricula providing additional content for a science program that includes science experiments in every classroom on “Hand-on Tuesdays”. Interactive technology-based programs such as *MyOn*, *Mathletics*, *IXL*, and *Reading A-Z* provide additional access to Common Core-aligned resources and tasks for all students, with laptops in classrooms for all students with disabilities and ELLs to have ready access to these resources and related supports.
- Monthly pacing calendars by grade, unit maps, lesson plans and student work reflect academic tasks that require students to engage in close reading of the texts, complete essays that involve making and supporting claims with text based evidence, and prepare summaries of reading selections about a variety of topics across content areas and grades. Further, there are projects requiring students to produce informational essays and describe math problem solving or science inquiry steps. Curricula also include content for a character education initiative and a “Puppetry in Practice” program that provides students with disabilities and ELLs with exposure to playwriting and theatrical performances linked to folktales. Curricula for drama, music, dance and technology classes add experiences designed to build college and career readiness skills for all studies.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Students engage in high level discussions and complete intellectually demanding tasks across classrooms. Teaching practices demonstrate applications of multiple entry points and extensions of tasks for all learners.

Impact

Through consistent application of scaffolds and multiple entry points to curricula, all students engage in rigorous tasks and discussions that culminate in high quality work products across all grades and content areas.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade 3 math class, students engaged in peer-to-peer questioning and discussion as they worked to solve problems that required them to use the associative property of multiplication to find the product of combinations of numbers. After working independently, students conferred with peers, using math vocabulary to discuss solutions to their problems. They experimented with multiplying numbers in different orders and noting the changes in answers, based on differences between the commutative versus associative property. Similarly, the teacher of a grade 4 ELA class for students with disabilities engaged students in a high level discussion after he read aloud a text projected on an interactive white board while the students followed along. Students used a map to view Leicester, the setting of the story, and worked in groups, citing evidence from the text, “King of the Parking Lot” to responded to questions about the main character. Students could be heard challenging their peers thinking as they completed the task of making inferences and charting main ideas about the life and personality of King Richard III, “over 500 years after his death.”
- Across classrooms visited, teachers provided visual supports and scaffolds for students at all levels to be highly engaged in learning. In a grade 2 science class the teacher used an interactive white board to present a mini-lesson about how objects decompose in soil. She gave each group of students a tray with a plant, pebble and soil and asked them to make predictions about what would happen to the objects over time. Students moved the objects around in the tray, taking note of characteristics that they wrote about on a science lab report template. These types of supports and practices were also noted in another science class where students acted as chemists, using water, ink and strips of paper in a hands-on investigation of the changes in the color of the paper when the water and ink come into contact with each other. They learned about “chromatography” as a process that allows chemists to see pigments in watercolor and what that means for their lives as chemists.
- The use of extensions of tasks to deepen student engagement in challenging work was evident in several classrooms, including a grade 4 math class where groups of students worked on differentiated math problems, using math facts and place value to divide different sets of numbers. The teacher directed students who finished early to move on to additional problem-solving activities, using *IXL* or *Mathletics* resources. In a grade 4 social studies class, similar practices resulted in students having the opportunity to choose an article from a set of differentiated articles about animals and read to find main idea and details to be inserted on a graphic organizer, also differentiated for varied levels of complexity per group. The teacher directed students who finished before others to move on by choosing and completing an additional activity from the back of the sheet with the reading selection. Students chose articles from *Time for Kids*, *Scholastic Reading Skills* or *Non-fiction Comprehension Connection* and used a web to illustrate main idea and details from the text.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff constantly communicate expectations for high levels of shared accountability for staff and student learning. All staff members communicate and partner with families to support all students in meeting college and career readiness expectations. (a, b)

Impact

Ongoing communication of and support for high expectations for all staff foster mutual accountability for improving teaching and learning across the school. Strong partnerships among staff and families contribute to students' progress in meeting high expectations for their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers reported that they collaborate regularly with peers, around strategies for addressing schoolwide expectations related to the needs of students in all subgroups. They share best practices for: meeting expectations such as flexible grouping of students for small group differentiated instruction across content areas; crafting tasks for immersing students in math and reading practice activities; use of rubrics and checklists to hold students accountable for their learning; implementation of checks for understanding during lessons; and offering student choice in learning tasks. The school's instructional focus that requires all teachers to use text-based evidence to support and strengthen questioning and discussion techniques. School leaders also work with teacher teams to implement a mandate that holds all teachers accountable for incorporating a minimum of three higher order thinking questions and differentiated tasks in every lesson, using Bloom's *Revised Taxonomy* and/or Webb's *Depth of Knowledge*.
- During the teacher team meetings, several teachers stated that the principal reinforces high expectations for teaching and learning through a monthly calendar, weekly staff meetings and other professional learning sessions that involve reviews of expectations for classwork, homework and ongoing assessment of learning. Using feedback on formal and informal observations and follow-up conferences, school leaders train teachers to align their practice to targeted domains and components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Based on 2014-2015 MOTP data and teachers' self-selected professional goals, differentiated professional learning activities focus specifically on topics such as designing coherent instruction, questioning and discussion techniques, and engaging students in learning. Teachers also view videos and vignettes of model classes and engage in peer inter-visitations to learn about these practices. School leaders also offer additional support to all teachers by participating in team activities.
- Through a monthly curriculum newsletter, curriculum nights, emails, texts, and face-to-face meetings, staff members inform families about expectations for their children. Further, staff members conduct workshops for families, host a monthly open house and regularly provide families with reports about their children's progress in meeting learning targets. Family outreach activities, especially during the designated time on Tuesdays, enable parents to visit the school to meet with their children's teachers. A recently hired former parent volunteer now serves as the school's new parent coordinator, leading staff and families in initiatives to increase parent involvement. In collaboration with staff and the parent coordinator, parents who are Learning Leaders partner with the school, offering parent-led workshops on topics such as Common Core Standards, strategies for helping children in reading and math and use of online resources to support learning at home. Some family members reported that they also facilitated a family reading and science night.