Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

J.H.S. 291 Roland Hayes

Middle School K291

231 Palmetto Street
Brooklyn
NY 11221

Principal: Janice Bruce

Date of review: March 4, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

The School Context

J.H.S. 291 Roland Hayes is a middle school with 346 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 15% Black, 81% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 30% English Language Learners and 20% students with disabilities. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 89.4%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Proficient**
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**	**Proficient**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Proficient**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Teacher teams meet regularly in collaborations, across grades and subjects, with a focus on refining curricula and improving instruction across the school. Distributed leadership structures support the development of teacher leadership throughout the school.

Impact
Teacher teamwork expands teacher capacity, allowing for identifying and sharing best practices and facilitating teacher voice in school level decisions that foster the improvement of teacher pedagogy and student progress towards learning goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaboratively develop units of study and adjust curriculum maps based on assessment data. For example, one teacher stated that after each Common Core-aligned end-of-unit or chapter assessment the grade team examines the results to determine next steps for students who do not meet the assessment's mastery target. This culminates in a class-level cycle of intervention report that identifies skill areas, percentage, and names of students mastering or not mastering the same skill across iterations of the assessment. The report also includes types of interventions implemented and comments about their impact. After additional skills building, one such report showed a class of grade 7 students advancing from a percentage mastery level of 29.7% to 50.5% across a math pre- and post-assessment.

- At team meetings, teachers use a protocol to examine student work and analyze elements of their practice to determine next steps for improving their performance as well as that of their students. At one such meeting observed during the Quality Review, the teachers analyzed levels of student mastery of an end-of-unit math assessment involving dilations and coordinates of points on a graph. They focused specifically on students in the bottom third as they used "A Progression toward Mastery" tool to examine the data for a total of 51 students across two grade 8 classes. They shared "noticings" such as common errors, and "wonderings" such as why 50% of students in one class achieved mastery while only 31% showed mastery in the other class. Teachers concluded that based on the data they would adjust the math curriculum by re-teaching with videos and adding more practice activities for students to improve fluency in the skills assessed.

- Teachers identified for high levels of expertise or recognized as instructional leaders by the principal or peers serve in roles such as lead teachers, Peer Collaborative Teachers (PCTs) and special education coach. In collaboration with school leaders and other instructional support staff, these teachers lead team meetings, host one-to-one coaching sessions, coordinate peer-peer intervisitations, and implement school-wide professional development events. They serve as members of the Instructional Cabinet, providing input in decisions about instructional resources for use across the school. The school leader noted that the teacher leaders also help to strengthen teacher capacity relative to the analysis of data and the delivery of instruction around targeted components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms lessons consistently afford most students a variety of entry points and opportunities for discourse among peers. However, most lessons do not offer avenues for advanced students to move beyond the task assigned to their group or the entire class.

Impact
Although consistent provision of scaffolds and multiple entry points foster high levels of student thinking and participation in learning across classrooms, there are missed opportunities to accelerate learning by consistently offering task extensions for advanced learners.

Supporting Evidence

- In a sixth grade social studies class, groups of students engaged in a lively discussion with peers as they read texts to compare and contrast elements of Christianity and Judaism. Using notes from a group chart and differentiated compare-contrast graphic organizers, they reported on their findings and responded to questions from peers across the room. Students in an English Language Arts (ELA class engaged in similar activities, where they edited each other's argumentative essay about the pros and cons of children participating in competitive sports. In both classes, students used accountable talk stems, academic vocabulary and group work protocols to state and defend their positions. They could be heard taking sides, creating claims, citing reasons for their claims, and making connections to textual evidence as well as their own life experiences. This high level of ownership of learning was not evident across all classes visited.

- Most lessons illustrate the use of supports and scaffolds such as templates with sentence starters, graphic organizers, manipulatives, and task cards. In a science classroom visited, individual and groups of students rotated across stations, using objects such as a cup, ball, ruler, stopwatch, and textbook, to engage in an investigation of how the height of a ramp affects the speed of an object rolling along a track. Using a stack of books with varied heights, students repeatedly rolled a ping-pong ball along a track on their desks and recorded data about the speed and distance of the ball from its origin. In a math class, the teacher demonstrated problem-solving steps on an interactive whiteboard, distributed differentiated sets of problems to groups of students, and supported them in their work by supplying calculators, graph paper, ruler, chart paper, and reference sheets that listed definitions of math vocabulary and formulas for problem solving.

- While most lessons challenged students to respond to high-level tasks, in a few places, students were not engaged in tasks matched to their ability levels, and students who finished a task early were not seen engaging in additional activities or extensions of the tasks. For example, in an ELA class for students with disabilities, the teacher engaged students in examining features of a good introduction by asking them to read and discuss a paragraph from an argumentative essay. The students quickly answered a few focus questions and sat waiting for a follow up task. In a math class, after answering a few questions about inequality statements involving rational numbers, some students in one group sat waiting and one finally said, "We need something else." By contrast, a teacher in a science class directed early finishers to move on by choosing a task from a collection of task cards seen in the Student Resource Center, which is a feature of all classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
All staff work collaboratively to align curricula across content areas to Common Core and other relevant standards and use student work and data to inform the design of tasks for all learners.

Impact
Teacher use of student work and data to adjust curricula allows all students to have access to Common Core-aligned units of study with tasks that target college and career readiness goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Unit plans show teacher use of Common Core-aligned curricula such as the *Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3*) text for math instruction, and tasks derived from revisions of past units and modification of lessons from *EngageNY,* for instruction across content areas. As part of a focus on deepening literacy based instruction, a teacher team is currently working on a fusion of content from the *Teacher's College Reading & Writing Project* curricula with content from existing units of curricula from *Expeditionary Learning.* New York City Scope and Sequence resources guide text-based instruction in social studies and science, with science curricula for grade 8 students being supplemented by investigations of topics from Urban Advantage curricula and aligned to standards identified by grade 8 New York State science assessments.

- Minutes of meetings show that at the start of the school year, teacher teams conducted data analysis of student baseline assessments and reviewed student work samples to determine adjustments needed for alignment of instruction to Common Core Learning Standards. For example, based on analysis of student work and data, teachers of English Language Arts (ELA) have incorporated additional writing tasks in lessons from *Expeditionary Learning* to deepen coverage of content and skills deemed essential for student mastery of targeted standards and instructional shifts. Further, given a school-wide instructional focus on language development, curricula reflect the use of tiered vocabulary as part of pre-reading activities. All teachers have access to collaboratively developed tasks through Google Docs, a digital platform that allows them to share their work around designing or refining curricula.

- Samples of student work across grades illustrate text-based argumentative writing in ELA and social studies, non-fiction informational or investigative writing in science and narrative writing and reasoning in math problem solving. One task showed students being asked to take a stand on the issue of the right to privacy versus freedom in the fight against terrorism. Another task challenged students to examine why a main character, Atticus, defends Tom Robinson, another character in the novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. In addition, through tasks linked to close reading of texts such as *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, students are required to cite relevant evidence and explore strategies for determining the meanings of complex vocabulary words. Web-based resources such as *IXL, Achieve 3000, BrainPOP,* and *MyON,* provide additional content and tasks for skills building across content areas and grades, during the regular school day as well as via a mandatory Extended Learning Time (ELT) program.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School-wide assessment practices include analysis of student work and other student assessment data, the results of which are used to highlight student progress towards learning goals and inform adjustments to curricula and instruction.

Impact
Teachers and students benefit from streams of data that are used to formulate and implement action plans, including instructional interventions and curricula adjustments, which address individual student needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Using a Data Driven Classroom (DDC) assessment system all teachers administer common assessments that generate data that they use to create and adjust curricula and pedagogy based on learning gaps and needs of students, as identified by reports from the DDC platform. Data reports and charts show that teachers administer common assessments, including a baseline assessment in ELA and pre- mid- and post-unit assessments in math, ELA, social studies, and science. A *Whole School Data Landscape* document records student scores on a variety of assessments, allowing teachers to hone in on individual, class, and school level needs, and follow up with differentiated intervention and enrichment activities, as evidenced on the Data Driven Instruction (DDI) logs completed by all teachers.

- A “Cycle of Intervention” protocol guides teacher team data analyses in ELA and math, promoting the focus on identifying learning gaps surfaced in item-skills data from unit assessments. The cycle includes a pre-assessment, check-ins, a post-assessment, and an action plan, for students who do not achieve the targeted level of mastery. Teachers maintain data folios to monitor student achievement and drive flexible grouping, and school leaders utilize the data to uncover performance and progress trends. Grade-wide trend analyses in ELA identified areas of challenge such as student inability to use content clues to tell the meaning of unfamiliar words and difficulty in citing relevant evidence from texts to support answers to short and extended response items. Adjustments included modifying student groupings, small group interventions, and aligning ELT assignments in math and ELA to student learning needs as identified by the data.

- During instruction viewed, teachers used assessment tools such as questioning, exit tickets, and index cards for Do-Nows, to gather data to inform instruction and assess student progress on learning tasks**.** In addition, although some teachers who walked around the room monitoring students did not use their observations to drive follow-up questioning or reinforce teaching points during the observed period, checks for understanding were consistently evident across classrooms. Conversations with students, review of student portfolios, and observation of work on bulletin boards, showed that students engage in self-assessment and know what to do to meet criteria outlined in rubrics and checklists linked to performance tasks. During the meeting with students one student presented a “Student Goal Sheet” that showed her goal in science for each quarter, actions taken to achieve the goal, reflections on progress made or not made to date, and next steps for continued movement towards goal attainment. Other students noted that they all have similar goal sheets that they use to assess their progress in all subject areas.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders continually communicate high expectations to all staff and provide multiple forms of support to help them meet the expectations. All staff members share expectations with and empower families to help their children meet all expectations.

Impact
Regular communication of high expectations for staff and students and collaborations among staff and students' families promote an understanding of expectations for learning and keep families informed about their children's progress towards achieving college and career readiness goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Interviews of selected teachers indicate that the principal ensures that all staff members are fully informed about expectations related to instruction, professional development, and other areas of school operations, through team discussions at staff conferences, one-to-one meetings, bulletins, memos, and a staff handbook. Areas of focus include differentiation of instruction, use of strategies that promote high levels of student engagement in rigorous work and discussions, and evidence of use of data to group students and create multiple entry points into learning tasks. The principal uses the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to reinforce the expectations, with all teachers receiving on-site professional development to improve their pedagogy. Teachers share best practices and instructional resources via Google Docs and school leaders use Google Docs to examine teacher and student data to develop next steps for improving staff and student achievement.

- The principal reviews conference notes, unit and lesson plans, and analyzes student work, to hold all staff accountable for the school's high expectations. For example, observation reports show explicit next steps and recommendations for re-teaching content and skills not yet mastered by students. In addition, teachers reported that the principal visits their classrooms regularly to follow up on the recommendations and offer additional support and feedback. One teacher noted that she received specific feedback about making a visible connection between student groups and data in her lesson, while another said she was reminded to use a focus question to guide student note-taking during reading. School leaders also provide direct support through modeling and collaborative planning with teachers. Professional learning consultants from Goldmansour & Rutherford, the Danielson Group, and the Center for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE), provide additional layers of targeted assistance for teachers.

- Communication tools such as hallway bulletin boards, newsletters, events calendars, letters, flyers, and postings on the school's own website, keep families up-to- date on school events and expectations. In addition, during the parent meeting, parents added that they are kept abreast of their children's progress toward expectations via progress reports, report cards, phone calls, and emails from some teachers. They all indicated that they also have access to data regarding their children's performance, via PupilPath, an online data portal designed to foster parent communication with teachers about their children's progress and expectations. Further, several said that they also receive information at weekly parent-teacher conferences on Tuesdays, open house, and at "Breakfast with the Principal." Others added that at monthly workshops, including a workshop on Common Core Learning Standards, they get resources to work with their children.