



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Essence School**

**Middle School K311**

**590 Sheffield Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11207**

**Principal: Jermaine Lewis**

**Date of review: March 8, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Michele Ashley**

## The School Context

Essence School is a middle school with 123 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 68% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 7% White students. The student body includes 20% English Language Learners and 34% students with disabilities. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry based, professional collaborations. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for targeted groups of students.

### Impact

Professional collaboration strengthens the instructional capacity of teachers and results in student progress toward goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Essence School teachers participate on a variety of teams including the instructional leadership team, grade level teams, and content area teams. The instructional leadership team is comprised of teacher leaders who meet weekly with school leadership to discuss and plan school wide initiatives. Teacher leaders plan and provide professional development and lead grade and content area meetings. Grade teams meet weekly, include all teachers on the grade, and represent multiple subject areas. Grade teams use protocols to analyze student work, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan next steps for instruction. There are five content area teams: English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, social studies, and special needs. Content area teams meet weekly for common planning in the content area. Content team members plan and adjust curriculum, create and analyze assessments, and discuss best practices. Each teacher leader maintains agendas, schedules, minutes, and notes for each grade and content team meeting. Student work is analyzed using a “30 Minute Protocol” in which the presenter provides an overview of the assignment and members read and annotate student work, identify what students know and are able to do, and share implications for teaching and assessment.
- Leadership shared that teacher teamwork has increased teacher capacity and moved school wide initiatives forward. Teacher leads spearheaded implementation of a school wide protocol for looking at student work and established inter-visitation schedules within and across grades and content areas. Teachers also shared that team collaboration has improved their practice through feedback, shared resources, and best practices. One teacher shared that he receives effective feedback on his instruction. He stated, “I walked in with a piece of work that I thought was outstanding and my teammates tore it apart. The work was not rigorous. It was the most beneficial professional development I ever had.”
- The grade 8 team analyzed student work using a 30 Minute Protocol. Teachers had copies of student work, a rubric, and a note-taking sheet. Teachers made annotations highlighting where the student met rubric standards and places that lacked evidence. Teachers shared notes from their note taking sheets with the presenting teacher. Team members shared instructional implications and next steps for individual and grade level instruction. Next steps included a writing conference with the student, the creation of a planning checklist for extended responses, ensuring that students use the planning page before writing, and reviewing common test vocabulary. Across grades, targeted students have demonstrated growth based on *Fountas and Pinnell* reading levels, writing performance tasks, and *Go Math* assessments. The average growth in math for grades 6, 7 and 8 is 7.4%.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices and student work products are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best.

### Impact

Alignment to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and instructional shifts support high levels of student thinking and participation across classrooms but have yet to be evident in the vast majority of classrooms. Limited opportunities for student led activities hinders students' ownership of their learning experience.

### Supporting Evidence

- The Essence School has an instructional focus on developing rigorous questions and discussion. Teachers have also agreed upon "Essence Essentials" for student learning and attempt to incorporate these essentials in their daily instruction. Essentials include, but are not limited to, "Students learn best when: they are engaged in rigorous tasks that take them through the different levels of the Webb's *Depths of Knowledge*, they practice fluency, application and deep understanding to ensure rigor in mathematics, students have the opportunity to write about their learning and support their writing with evidence, knowledge is built through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts, and teachers monitor student progress using formative assessment (checks for understanding) such as conference notes and exit slips, to drive their daily instruction."
- Evidence of Essence Essentials was observed across classrooms visited. Teachers used checks for understanding in the form of questioning and exit slips across grades and content areas. In a self-contained classroom, the teacher asks students to explain the formula for force. To check for understanding she asked students to define the components of the formula and explain how acceleration affects force. After the check, students applied their knowledge in an experiment and were able to explain that the height from which they dropped a marble increased the force with which it hit a bowl of flour. One student stated that the impact is smaller when the marble is dropped from a lower point. Another student responded that when the marble is higher it "picks up speed."
- Across classrooms visited, there were high levels of student engagement and opportunities for student discussion. Although discussions demonstrated high levels of thinking, students required prompting and guidance from teachers to maintain discussion levels. In a social studies classroom, students responded in writing to prompt questions based on selected background texts on the Harlem Renaissance. Once complete, students peer edited partner writing using a 2-point rubric and conducted peer conferences where they shared two things their partner did well and one area of improvement based on a rubric. One student noted, "You did well in citing evidence...next time you can explain more to support your evidence." A second student noted, "You show good understanding of the content, showing that they believe their race is successful. You gave clear details and enough details to support your claim. Next time sight evidence properly with punctuation." The level of independence and ownership present in this discussion was not yet evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

### Impact

Purposeful decisions build curricular coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- This year, school leadership and faculty have introduced new curricula in English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science to ensure that all curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. The school moved from *CMP3* and *Code X* to *Go Math* and *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project* in math and ELA. The science department adopted the Project Based Inquiry in Science (PBIS) curriculum and the social studies department revised all curriculum maps to align to the New York City Scope and Sequence for social studies. Curriculum maps reviewed align units and lessons to Common Core State Standards, identify skills and strategies to be taught, and contain essential questions, enduring understandings, unit questions, assessments, performance tasks and evidence. Evidence includes exit tickets, questions and answers, discussions, journals, reflections, self-assessments, and homework.
- Lesson plans collected included learning targets and academic tasks that integrate instructional shifts in ELA and Math. Lessons include tasks that require students to read informational and literary texts (ELA shift 1), build knowledge about the world through texts (ELA shift 2), write from sources (ELA shift 5), deepen their understanding of concepts (Math shift 4), and apply knowledge as needed (Math shift 5). A social studies lesson plan requires students to use evidence from real life court cases to deepen their understanding and possible applications of the United States Bill of Rights. The lesson requires students to apply their understanding of the Amendments to the Bill of Rights to make an argument for or against court cases involving book banning, school prayer, and school searches of students' personal belongings.
- Lesson plans collected adhere to the Essence Essentials for rigorous tasks and the incorporation of Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* level three and four activities. Lessons include plans for students to support ideas with details and examples, design investigations for a scientific problem, apply a mathematical model to illuminate a problem or situation, and analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources. A science lesson plans for students to design and conduct an experiment to model how the acceleration of meteors affects the size and shape of craters on the moon. The lesson requires students to make predictions based on height and acceleration and measure diameter of the impact. An ELA lesson plan requires students to read, analyze, and annotate sections of a text to determine the author's purpose and respond to a variety of prompt questions with details and text evidence.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals.

### Impact

Assessment practices provide actionable feedback to teachers and students. Feedback is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and content areas, teachers use assessments aligned to the content area curriculum. Benchmark assessments are administered on all grades levels in the *Go Math*, *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project*, *Project Based Inquiry in Science*, and *New York Scope and Sequence (Social Studies)* curricula. Performance tasks, midyear, and unit assessments have also been administered within each of the curricula. The *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project* curriculum includes checklists for writing within each genre and performance tasks are assessed on a four-point rubric. In addition, mock assessments are administered to prepare for the New York State assessments in ELA and math and the associated New York State rubrics are used to grade student performance.
- Teachers provide students with consistent feedback on their performance. Most of the students interviewed shared that they receive feedback from their teachers most of the time. Across grades and content areas, student work samples include feedback from teachers with clear statements of student performance and next steps. Students also provide peer feedback on some projects. Teacher feedback on a social studies assessment states, "Good use of background knowledge and claim. Next time, explain further why having shelter was important. Include your background knowledge of early humans during the Neolithic Era." A student's response to a classmate's narrative piece states, "I like the story very much. I see that you added sensory details. Next time, try to add foreshadowing." Students interviewed were able to articulate their next steps in learning based on written feedback.
- Teachers use data from assessments to make adjustments on unit plans and daily lessons. Assessment data led to a school wide focus on content and cross-disciplinary vocabulary being added to curriculum plans. Revisions on unit maps include additional lessons, tasks, and pacing adjustments. An ELA map includes teachers' notes, "Turn this unit question into a Socratic Seminar. Short on time, nix the two lessons with the x and create a seminar for the Spanish-American war or Jones Act." Teachers also use data from summative and formative assessments to adjust content and grade level lesson plans. Adjustments include differentiated tasks, discussions, "Do Now" questions, homework assignments, and small group instruction. A social studies lesson includes teacher notes to adjust pacing in order to allow additional time to read background material, complete a Do Now question, and engage in class discussion. Evidence of data based adjustments to curriculum was observed across content areas.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations and offer ongoing feedback to families.

### Impact

High expectations are building toward a culture of mutual accountability. Feedback and family support helps families understand student progress toward grade level expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership worked with faculty and staff to develop the Essence Essentials, the Essence School minimum requirements for a successful classroom. Essence Essentials require that “teachers reflect on assessment data and student work products to adjust their instruction” and list agreed upon best practices for rigorous instruction. School leaders hold teachers accountable for expectations and adherence to the Essence Essential through consistent observations and leader feedback aligned to the essentials. In addition, teachers conduct visitations of colleagues’ classrooms and provide feedback aligned to the essentials. One peer observation sheet states “Next time pull more students into the discussion and set up systems to prompt passionate discussion.”
- School leaders provide training to all staff to support Essence Essential and Essence School P.O.W.E.R. (Preparation, Ownership, Wonder, Excellence and Respect) standards and curricula. This year, teachers receive ongoing professional development and curriculum support from the *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project* (ELA, science and social studies), National Training Network (math), *PBIS* (science), and the borough field support office. The professional development calendar also includes sessions on Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge*, Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, inquiry protocols, rigorous questioning and effective discussion techniques, and using assessment data to drive instruction.
- Teachers and staff provide consistent information and updates on student progress through an online grade book, Engrade. Families have access to and utilize Engrade to access student grades, attendance, and progress reports. Parents also access student and school information through the school website and monthly newsletters. Parents interviewed shared that there is regular communication between parents and teachers via telephone and face-to-face meetings. One parent shared, “Anytime a student falls below standards, parents are informed.” The PTA (Parent Teacher Association) has provided information sessions on the Common Core Learning Standards, and teachers inform parents of grade level expectations. Grade 8 parents received support with the high school application process and were informed of high school fairs. School staff met with parents one on one to review high school selections. One parent of a wheel chair bound student shared that the school ensured that her child applied to wheel chair accessible school campuses.