



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

M.S. K394

Elementary – Middle School K394

**188 Rochester Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11213**

Principal: Guendalina Shaw-Pieters

**Date of review: December 17, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

M.S. K394 is an elementary – middle school with 575 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 6% Asian, 77% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 13% students with disabilities. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.4%.

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	Celebration	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		
<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	Proficient
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school leaders and staff ensure that all curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards with emphasis on the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks offer multiple opportunities for students to engage in higher-order skills.

Impact

School leaders and faculty are decisive in building instructional coherence so that all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, engage in rigorous habits that prepare them for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has made curricula and planning a priority and this is in evidence in all Common Core-aligned curricula documents reviewed. Students engage in research, read informational texts, and provide evidence to support their thinking in all grades and subjects. For example, fourth grade English Language Arts (ELA) students provide text-based responses to prompts such as: what details explain why spiders don't get stuck in webs? They also located landmarks, landforms boundaries, and bodies of water on maps in history. Additionally, all planning documents include tiered activities for students who are "at, below or above level" aligned to the same learning objective.
- Tasks include differentiated strategies to support English Language Learners and students with disabilities such as: creating a web to generate prior knowledge about a topic; view informational computer programs; and note take on a variety of organizers and charts to support writing, research, and access to content.
- Teachers shared that they use data to adjust curricula to include scaffolds that engage English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Additionally, extension activities were in evidence in many of the tasks in classrooms visited. To this end, teachers and the school leaders revised the purchased standards-based curricula, to include phonemic awareness into units when they realized that students needed more support.
- The principal shared that teachers develop lesson objectives to make goals clear to students. Teachers craft their objectives using the nouns from the standard to determine what students need to know and be able to do, and this planning practice has created instructional coherence across grades and content areas particularly because teachers utilize the Depth of Knowledge research in unit plans. The principal shared that she expects to see level three and four questions in curricula and tasks to ensure that teachers deeply understand standard terminology, and so that the task requires higher-order thinking.
- In an eighth grade classroom, students prepared for a Socratic seminar prior to which they had read a balance of informational texts and a novel regarding the impact of war on those left behind. Several supports were in place for students such as: anchor charts for notetaking, and chunked and/or translated texts.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School-wide practices are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and students engage in discussions regularly to share their thinking.

Impact

Student work products and discussions reflect multiple entry points leading to high levels of engagement and participation by most learners. However, there are fewer opportunities for students to own their learning experiences as teacher-generated questioning guides most discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal believes that students work best when interacting with each other in small groups and this was in evidence across most classrooms. In a Living Environment class, for example, after students read an informational text, they engaged in a discussion to connect the lab to their lives, such as taking the pulse multiple times to establish patterns. Many students offered ideas such as: smoking and birth defects; “to see how much blood pumps per second;” and “if you are under sixty, you would want to get your heart rate up.” Students called upon each other to add or raise a new point, and used accountable talk stems. Such discussion protocols were evident in several other classrooms, but not yet consistent across the vast majority.
- In some classrooms, students were engaged in tasks and routines that promoted high levels of discussion and thinking, and consistently shared ideas with partners or in small groups. For example, in an eighth grade ELA class, students received “quote cards” which captured first-hand experiences of Bosnian refugees: “I lived under Communism for fourteen years. Nobody I knew practiced religion. And then suddenly they tried to kill me because of religion.” Students turned to each other to discuss the challenges refugees face upon returning home, and determine the strongest evidence to support their response.
- Teachers modeled task expectations which sometimes did not provide opportunities for students to engage in productive struggle, or to own their learning experiences. For example, in one math class, the teacher modeled problem solving, and then when it was time for the student to engage in the process, they were given the exact problem the teacher had just solved, rather than an opportunity to apply what they learned to a new problem.
- The school provides small group instruction during the school day for grades three through eight, three times a week. Extra teachers push in to provide the individualized and skill-based instruction targeted to student need and level. At the start, students were grouped based on state scores – low, middle, and high. The principal shared that this has been refined so that more data points inform the flexible groupings. This support structure is embedded into the school day so that all students make progress toward standards. One student offered, “We are grouped based on our ability.” For example, some students are multiplying two digit numbers by two digit numbers and others are multiplying multiple digit numbers, or working on word problems. Additionally, there are double blocks in English so that students engage in independent reading where they are encouraged to read non-fiction texts.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Common curricula-aligned rubrics and assessments are used consistently across classrooms to determine student progress toward meeting standards.

Impact

All students consistently receive actionable feedback that provides them with clear next steps regarding their progress. Teachers use assessment data to adjust curricula and instruction to best meet student's needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics and actionable feedback accompany all tasks and in-class work. All students said that they use rubrics in most of their classes. They were able to target where they were on a given task, and how to move to the next level. They understood the purpose of the rubrics, and how it helps them to understand what they need to work on. A student shared that all students keep a rubric in the back of their notebooks, and that it is particularly helpful when writing because it shows exactly what you need to accomplish to earn a four. All feedback recognizes “glows” and “grows,” and is aligned to rubric expectations. For example, “You provided a very detailed essay about scientific notation and solved most of the questions correctly. You need to practice strategies for subtracting numbers in scientific notations. See me during conferencing.”
- In three classrooms, teachers adjusted their lesson to clarify vocabulary used or to address students' questions with the whole class after a check in. There was also ample evidence that teachers keep conference notes, and provide exit slips with prompt questions to summarize learning and demonstrate understanding. All teachers maintain data binders that track student progress on common and teacher-generated assessments, and store all conferencing notes and formative assessments. In the team meeting, all teachers had their binders so that as they discussed students and their work, they could reference them for more data points. Teachers then make adjustments to tasks and their practice to meet the needs of their students.
- Students maintain portfolios of their work that include drafts of writing and teacher feedback, and teachers bring this work to their one-on-one conferences with students. The purpose of this structure is to share student progress toward standards and objectives, and, as the principal noted, to uncover misconceptions.
- During the student meeting all students presented work accompanied by the task rubric. They spoke readily to why they earned the grade they did, and what they would need to do to move to a level three or four. For example, one student shared that his geography research project took him weeks to complete, “But my teacher supported us.” He realized that in order to improve his grade, he would need to add more details and strengthen his conclusion.
- The Middle School Quality Initiative assessments surfaced that students were not using the selected vocabulary in their writing; teachers adjusted their lessons to address this.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school's leaders consistently communicate high expectations regarding instruction aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching to all staff. Parents learn about the school's expectations connected to a path of high school readiness.

Impact

Ongoing professional development opportunities support teachers and hold them accountable for meeting the school's expectations. Given the school's communication practices, parents are well informed of their children's progress toward academic expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader holds high expectations for classroom instruction and communicates this with consistency to all school staff. She has moved teachers from delivering information to "explicitly teaching students the skills they need to meet high expectations." The principal has provided multiple and ongoing professional training from having teachers join her in monthly instructional rounds at various schools, Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI) school visits, and providing workshops in practices such as: accountable talk stems. The principal also collects teacher's data binders monthly to ensure that teachers are collecting and analyzing their students' progress.
- Parents shared that the school communicates with them regularly regarding their children's progress. One parent stated that the "school has been good to us, they send notices and we have access to the teachers every Tuesday" where they learn how to help their children at home. "They let us know before it gets to a critical point." Another parent shared that if she is unsure about how to support her child, she reaches out to the teacher, or puts a question mark on the assignment to alert the teacher, and get feedback.
- Parents noted that the school provides many workshops such as: helping children succeed in school; understanding the Common Core Learning Standards, and preparing for high school. One parent offered that when she googles her daughter's assignment, it is a grade level higher. The school provides websites to support students and their parents in math and ELA. Additionally, parent communication forms indicate that discussions between parents and teachers result in goals to support student progress.
- The principal modeled a lesson study with a fourth grade lesson plan. This, she shared was done to encourage teachers to look and listen for student misconceptions, so that student groupings are purposeful and targeted to student need. Reviewing the lesson and the resulting student work was of great benefit to teachers who have adopted this process in grades three through five. In looking at students' errors, teachers began to understand "what our kids needed." This led to teachers developing support charts, being more thoughtful about grouping, as well as considering students' understanding before and during a lesson. The principal will next focus on kindergarten through second grade. The principal shared that the fourth grade class we visited where students were determining the evidence for the most practical spider web they would use if they were a spider had been a model for the lesson study.

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

All teachers are engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations in support of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers consistently review multiple data points for students they share.

Impact

Teachers are professionally supported by their work in teams, and recognize the work as supporting student progress towards goals for a variety of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- After reviewing her data at the end of the year, the principal realized that the school’s students with disabilities had not made adequate progress. This led to a sharpened focus, “We were looking at differentiated practice, but not at who our students are.” Teachers shared that when they look at student work they do so across levels to include an English Language Learner, a student with disabilities, and a high performer. They collectively determine what a student can do (strengths), what a student can almost do, and what a student cannot do (weakness) to come to consensus on next instructional steps. In the team meeting attended, teachers looked at three narrative pieces from students across levels. They noted that one student was strong in paragraphing and introductions, but needed to work on transitions and, for this assignment, incorporating dialogue more effectively. The second student engaged the reader by incorporating lively dialogue and structured the narrative well. While he used some transitions, work was still needed, and the final student, a student with disabilities, was strong in structure and developing a plotline, but would need support in formal writing and conventions. As this was something teachers saw in other student work, the team agreed to structure a small group to review conventions as a next step. This, the teachers shared, would inform conferencing discussions. When asked how this protocol has impacted their students, teachers looked to their data binders to name students who remained the same, and students who had made progress.
- Several teachers spoke to how team collaboration has improved their practice. One teacher shared that it is because “we all have different backgrounds and insights that we can we pull from each other’s strengths.” Another teacher shared, “This is the life of a teacher, to learn. I have to have a toolkit to meet my students’ needs.” A science teacher shared that the attention she pays to her students’ different learning styles is a direct result of discussions at the team level. The teacher presents the ideas to school leaders for professional development.
- Teachers also shared the many ways they adjust their curricula and tasks collaboratively to align to the Common Core Learning Standards and to engage their students. For example, teachers are using more visuals in math and ELA to provide access for students. They have revised an Expeditionary Learning unit that was too long to provide more student engagement. The social studies team revised curriculum maps to align to the new standards. One team agreed to prioritize academic vocabulary and teachers across content areas remain focused on the same words each week to support students’ vocabulary development. This was evident in team notes across the school.