



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

River East Elementary

Elementary School M037

**508 East 120th Street
Manhattan
NY 10035**

Principal: Don Catlin

**Date of review: November 17, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek**

The School Context

River East Elementary is an elementary school with 201 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 0% Asian, 44% Black, 52% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 23% 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 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	Focus	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 <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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Teachers, across the vast majority of classrooms, plan and implement multiple entry points and extensions strategically to support all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, in fully participating in rigorous academic tasks and demonstrating their thinking.

Impact

Teaching practices reflect a coherent belief system about how students learn best. High quality supports and extensions enable all students to fully participate in challenging academic work and discussions where they demonstrate higher-order thinking and take ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In a fifth grade science lesson, students were deeply engaged in higher order thinking as they worked in pairs excitedly constructing Lego robotic "drumming monkeys". Each pair of students shared one Lego robotics kit and a computer loaded with We-Do programming software. Students also used their notebooks to record their ideas, questions, and reflections. Some students sketched and labeled models and ideas in their notebooks, while other students wrote in complete sentences which they stated was their choice. While the student pairs were at different stages of the task, all students were highly engaged in conversation regarding the task. Students explained how the different sized cams and levers affected the movement of their monkeys. Two students at the programming stage of the task were able to demonstrate and explain how to use the software to add a variety of sounds like banging and whistling to their monkey's movement. When asked why they were building robots and designing code for them one student said, "If I want to become an engineer this knowledge will help me out."
- Across classrooms, teachers strategically provide multiple entry points and extension supports for all learners. For example, during a second grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) math class, students were comparing two and three digit numbers using station teaching strategies to differentiate student support activities based on prior assessment. One teacher worked with a group of students using base-ten blocks on a place value mat to determine the larger number. The second teacher worked with a group of students using skip counting to solve word problems on dry erase boards. A student teacher worked with a student from a third station where students were assigned individualized games on counting forward and backward by ones, using a number line accurately, and skip counting to solve efficiently and help support student understanding of number size and order.
- The school's instructional focus this year, "Feedback", is based on the school-wide belief that student self-awareness is a most important factor in increasing student achievement. Student samples of narrative writing were available across the school in student writing notebooks, folders containing student writing in various stages of planning, editing, and revising, final published pieces, and on-demand writing assessments. These Common Core-aligned essays included specific feedback for students to use to improve the quality of their work and became incorporated into goal-setting for students. Teachers support each other in this work by designing focused teaching points and assessing each other's efforts through peer visitation with feedback, resulting in instructional coherence and discussions in this regard at the team and school levels.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school has aligned curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards with the integration of the instructional shifts and an emphasis on critical thinking skills and analysis for all learners. Presently, the school is piloting a new math program in the upper grades to strengthen coherence by further alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards.

Impact

The curricular planning and revising promotes coherence which ensures that all students are college and career ready, and have access to tasks across grades and content areas that encourage thinking for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps are organized for each grade across reading, writing, math, social studies, and science from September until June in cycles ranging from four through eight weeks and reflect the Common Core Learning Standards and New York City scope and sequence for science and social studies. The science curriculum includes life science, earth science and computer science. The students work on a computer science curriculum that starts with basic programming in the lower grades and expands to programming LEGO robotics with computers in the upper grades.
- The school uses the Teachers' College curriculum for both reading and writing resulting in substantial gains in English Language Arts proficiency levels on State exams over the past three years. Recent drops in fourth and fifth grade math proficiency levels have prompted the school to drop *Investigations* and *EngageNY* curricula for those two grades and substitute the *Envision* math program as a pilot this year while the lower grades continue to use the former curriculum. Social studies content is embedded in the school's reading and writing curriculum.
- In addition to unit culminating tasks in varied writing genres, students complete two projects each year that require research, collaboration with peers, format selection, and a presentation. For example, in a social studies unit, students choose a topic of their choice from America's Westward Expansion and choose to write an essay, create a power point, and make a brochure or other formats, all of which culminate in a presentation.
- Teachers are provided with common planning time to look at student work and revise units to meet student needs. For instance, a fifth grade team reflects on trends identified during their collaborative examinations of student work and decides to add lessons on using dialogue, pacing, paragraphing time and space, and using transitional words for change in time to the previous year's narrative craft unit plan.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teachers consistently use Common Core-aligned assessments and scaffolded rubrics and checklists that offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teacher assessment practices consistently reflect the use of on-going one-to-one checks for understanding and student self-reflections.

Impact

Teachers and students receive meaningful feedback regarding student achievement. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and students, across all grades, are keenly aware of their next learning steps to demonstrate mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Fountas and Pinnell leveled reading assessments, Teachers College writing rubrics, and teacher-created, Common Core-aligned pre- and post-unit math assessments to track student progress, set goals, and make curricular and instructional adjustments to meet student needs. Grade level teams meet weekly to review assessment data and identify target groups of students that are struggling with a specific standard so that they can design an instructional change strategy and track student progress. For example, a grade 2 team identified a target group of students struggling with solving word problems that included students with disabilities. As a result of this work, a visualizing strategy was added to the steps students use to solve story problems enabling all students to demonstrate increased mastery.
- Actionable and meaningful feedback using various tools was evident in all classrooms. During the student meeting, students were able to speak to feedback regarding their achievement. They shared that teachers have one-to-one conferences with them that are used to establish goals that include specific skills and strategies the student will use to achieve them. They further explained that at the end of each conference, each student is left with a "focus" list of specific skills and strategies. Students also mentioned that feedback is given to them through checklists, rubrics, sticky notes, and reflections, and that most of the time the feedback becomes their short-term or learning goal. This school-wide focus enables students to receive consistent feedback across subjects that enables them to concentrate on their next learning steps to increase mastery. For example, the portfolio of a second grade student with disabilities contained beginning and ending unit samples of narrative writing over a six week period in which the student moved from a level 1 to level 2.7 in her narrative writing skills utilizing provided feedback and next step suggestions.
- Project-based learning units must be student selected, require collaboration, and include both a written component and an oral presentation. Teachers assess pre- and post-performance tasks for each project utilizing Teachers College writing rubrics that scaffold expectations in each genre from kindergarten through grade 5. Other rubrics are used to assess content, creativity and innovation, collaboration, and presentation quality. Students use scaffolded rubrics (kindergarten to grade 2 and grades 3 to 5) to peer and self-assess the aforementioned areas.
- In all meetings, teachers, students, assistant principals, and the principal concur that feedback is given via teacher-to-student, student-to-student, self-reflection and self-assessment and this was evident in all classrooms.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training around professionalism and instruction in alignment with the Danielson Framework to the entire staff. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations for all students related to college and career readiness in partnerships with families.

Impact

The clear communication regarding the school's high expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability for those expectations, ensuring that students, including high-needs subgroups, own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's overarching goal this year is to develop highly effective feedback practices in the following areas; teacher-to-student, teacher-to-teacher, student-to-student, teacher-to-parent, and teacher-to-school leader. These foci are in direct alignment to the Danielson *Framework* components regarding feedback to students, student self-assessment, and receptivity to feedback from colleagues. The entire staff read the book *Mindset* by Carol Dweck to inform their practice of how they give feedback to students with regards to high expectations. A committee discussed ways to communicate high expectations to students while still praising effort over achievement. As a result, each class identifies a student each week who is recognized for working hard and two students are celebrated at weekly "Town Meeting" assemblies. In addition, teacher leaders have formed teacher groups to visit each other's classrooms with a focus on feedback. One group of teachers collaboratively designed Great Leaps Math goal sheets, class clothespin goal charts, and reading goal bookmarks to improve feedback effectiveness.
- During the parent meeting, parents shared how teachers and school leaders provided guidance regarding their children's academic, social and emotional progress while communicating, celebrating and providing opportunities for parents and students to learn. For example, while parents described the work their children do as challenging and sometimes hard for the parents to understand, they praised the curriculum nights, literacy nights and math mac-and-cheese nights they attend for providing them with strategies they can use to support their children's learning. Parents also remarked at how helpful the weekly check-in forms they receive each week were that enable them to track the academic, social and emotional progress of their children. The school uses student-led conferences at parent-teacher conferences to ensure that students are aware of their progress and are able to articulate their next learning steps. Also, students tour Columbia University and the school designs a career day each year to highlight different careers students can aspire to as part of their college and career readiness practices.
- The school uses its small size to ensure that every student receives differentiated and targeted feedback. New students and teachers are introduced to the school at Town Meetings. The school's mentoring program pairs each staff member with students in need of emotional or academic support who are not receiving mandated or "at-risk" counseling resulting in 25% of total students receiving 1-to-1 support. In addition, the school's Response to Intervention (RTI) team identifies struggling students, creates time-sensitive goals, and identifies a "point person" who helps the teacher create a plan for that student to ensure that high needs subgroups are prepared for the next level.

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

The vast majority of teachers work successfully in team structures to analyze student data and work and share best practices in inquiry-based, structured collaborations. Distributive leadership structures are embedded in the school culture.

Impact

Inquiry work has led to increased student achievement for all learners, effective teacher leadership, shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams are organized within grade level and vertically. Grade level teams meet regularly (three periods per week) to refine curriculum and pedagogy based on the collaborative analysis of student work. For example, a kindergarten team used videotaping in combination with student progress monitoring data to develop next steps for students in their math target group that presented difficulty counting objects up to ten. During the meeting, teachers stated the importance of this foundational Common Core Learning Standard and suggested numerous ideas for improvement that included providing students with larger number lines to provide adequate room to place the objects being counted and taking footsteps as they count to slow down their counting and prevent students from skipping numbers.
- Grade teacher team leaders are also part of vertical math and literacy teams and meet on these teams to determine any school-wide trends that could be used to improve instructional capacity and student achievement. For example, an identified need to increase the effectiveness and frequency of providing multiple entry points to all students led teacher leaders to design and conduct professional development on differentiated station teaching techniques that were observed during numerous classroom visits. As a result, the school received a perfect "four bars" in improving students with special needs on the English Language Arts State exam. The principal credited these practices as part of the reason that the school's proficiency levels on State exams increased 10% in English Language Arts and 9% in math last year.
- Among a staff of 22 teachers, 8 teachers have received training in being effective facilitators through the Department of Education. This high percentage of distributed leadership enables the school to provide a strong support system for new teachers. Professional development cycles are teacher-led and set up for groups of teachers according to their interest and need. This year's vision and instructional focus is "Feedback". Teacher teams put this vision into motion by sharing best practices with each other during professional development sessions. Peer visitations are set up where teachers can see effective practices in other classrooms in order to put them into action in their own classrooms their way. For example, in alignment with this year's "Feedback" focus, a fourth grade teacher team modeled their version of "weekly check-in" forms to communicate student progress to parents that each teacher used to design their own version that meets their teaching style and the needs of their students. This reliance on teacher voice and teacher leadership has enabled the school to receive a perfect "four bars" in the area of "Collaborative Teachers" on the most recent School Quality Report and a score of 93% in Trust on the most recent Learning Environment Survey.