



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**The STAR Academy – P.S. 63**

**Elementary School M063**

**121 East 3 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10009**

**Principal: Darlene Cameron**

**Date of review: October 27, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek**

## The School Context

The STAR Academy – P.S. 63 is an elementary school with 200 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 5% Asian, 20% Black, 66% Hispanic, and 9% White students. The student body includes 3% English Language Learners and 30% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.8%.

## 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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across grades and subject areas, school leaders and faculty align curricula to content and Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricular and task development and on-going refinement are data-driven.

### Impact

Careful alignment of curricula to the Common Core and intentional integration of instructional shifts established instructional coherence across grades that promotes college and career readiness for all students. Data-driven curricula refinement ensures that all students have access to the curricula and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- In collaboration with school leaders and staff developers, teacher teams use incoming class student data and their students' growing exposure to the Common Core to revise and update units of study and intentionally emphasize instructional shifts across subjects and grades. In English Language Arts, teachers adapt and modify the Teachers College Reading and Writing units of study to ensure that students build knowledge through a balance of non-fiction and fiction texts while regularly exposing students to complex text and rich vocabulary through ongoing read-alouds and shared reading activities. In math and other subjects, teachers use the Understanding by Design framework, a planning approach to design curriculum that is standards-aligned, focuses on big ideas rather than facts, and utilizes performance tasks to assess mastery of the big ideas. Lesson plans consistently contain high level questions that require students to apply knowledge and demonstrate their thinking either verbally or in writing or both. For example, a grade 5 lesson on multiplication and division goes beyond finding remainders in division by requiring students to interpret the remainder in various word problems by identifying and discussing patterns in which remainders are sometimes the answer, sometimes ignored, and sometimes used to add to an answer in order to infer the problem's correct answer.
- During a team meeting, teachers worked in pairs and used samples of grade 1 student work regarding addition and subtraction within 100 to place students at their respective entry points on a teacher-made toolkit continuum. Teachers across grades expect students to develop concrete, pictorial, verbal, and abstract comprehension of numeracy. This toolkit, as well as others in English Language Arts, is regularly used by teachers to adjust lesson and unit plans by creating groups that identify struggling students in need of extra support, average students, and advanced students in need of a challenge to ensure that the lowest- and highest-achieving students are fully engaged in the curricula.
- A review of student work samples across the grades demonstrated the use of strategies to develop, revise and edit writing utilizing checklists and rubrics that increase in expectation as grades progress. In math, students are explicitly taught to use a six-step math problem-solving protocol wherein they must: read the question, make a visual model, determine the operation, identify a strategy to solve, answer the question, and ask themselves if it makes sense. These practices cognitively engage students and help them persevere in their writing and problem-solving tasks.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across the majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect school-wide beliefs regarding student-centered learning and accountable talk. Teaching practices consistently provide students with a variety of entry points.

### Impact

All students are engaged in challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products. However, the school-wide instructional focus on accountable talk and increased student-to-student discussion has not yet extended to the vast majority of classrooms and therefore do not always reflect high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers employ a variety of entry points to engage all students in learning. Students in a grade 4 Integrated Co-Teaching class worked in small groups to identify recurring themes based on textual evidence gathered during a read-aloud activity as part of an activity designed to help them put their thinking into writing. Each group of students was provided with various paper choice options such as one including sentence starters and structure boxes. Multiple groups worked directly with one of the teachers or paraprofessionals during this part of the lesson; however, most discussion was teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher with only some higher level student-to-student discussion.
- Aligned to instructional shifts, grade 1 students are introduced to a unit on informational books by watching a video clip of a four year old "expert" being interviewed by a well-known talk show host. The teacher and students discuss tactics used by the expert that include using one's hand as a graphic organizer. Students then choose a topic they feel they are expert on and with a partner they use their hand as a graphic organizer to orally teach their partner all they know about the topic and jot down ideas in their writing notebooks in preparation for an informational writing piece.
- Supports for students with disabilities and English language learners ensure that students participate in the same challenging assignments and tasks. During classroom visits, the following array of supports was observed: small group guided reading instruction, flexible grouping, vocabulary scaffolds, graphic organizers, microphones for hearing aids, preferential seating cushions for sensory input and focusing, and the use of I-Pads to record written work. These consistent practices across classrooms contribute to the school's good standing regarding making adequate yearly progress for these subgroups.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use and create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula, track progress and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Actionable and meaningful feedback are provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement so that teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has established a consistent system of assessment across grades and subjects that is analyzed by teachers to adjust lesson and unit planning as well as share feedback with students. School-wide benchmark formative assessments such as running records, on-demand cold writes, independent reading assessments, math fluency assessments, and problem solving assessments are ongoing to provide teachers and students with a clear portrait of student progress towards mastery of Common Core Learning Standards. This, in turn, is used to make strategic adjustments in unit and lesson planning. For example, the grade 2 teacher team added a misconceptions and clarifications section to a math unit on base ten addition operations with and without regrouping to provide teachers with specific strategies to use with students who present any of the identified difficulties in this area.
- Teachers routinely demonstrate the use of ongoing assessment practices through their use of questioning, exit slips, student notebooks, on-demand performance tasks, and rubrics and checklists that are used for student self-assessment. These practices enable teachers to facilitate effective flexible grouping, make on-the-spot lesson adjustments, and use tiered teaching objectives when planning lessons. In addition, these tools enable students to regularly reflect on their work, stamina and effort and are used together with teacher feedback to establish individual goals during conferencing. As a result, students are aware of their next learning steps and all students demonstrate increased mastery. For example, proficiency levels on math State assessment scores for all male students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, has almost tripled over the last three years from 11.8% to 33%.
- Teachers regularly use conferring logs and rubrics relative to student work to serve as ongoing checks for understanding for all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities. This allows teachers to provide students with targeted and actionable feedback that results in self-reflection and improved mastery of learning goals as evidenced by student projects shared during the student meeting.

<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 staff and provide professional development to all staff. School leaders and staff communicate high expectations to students, families, and each other with a clear path towards college and career readiness.

### Impact

A system of accountability and supports is in place for teachers to meet these expectations while students regularly practice self-management to improve both social-emotional and academic skills. Parents are provided with information that helps them to understand their child's progress and the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards.

### Supporting Evidence

- Professional learning for all staff is at the forefront of the school's work. Teachers attend professional development sessions over the summer resulting in a school-wide plan that informs professional growth for the year.
- During the leadership meeting, the principal stated that teaching is seen as a reflective and growing process as teachers: participate in new-teacher professional development, use drop-box to share lesson planning ideas, engage in book study through professional book clubs, conduct ongoing visits to each other's classrooms for observation and feedback, conduct professional development, and regularly collaborate to improve pedagogical development based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Through common planning meeting notes, data meeting next steps, Individualized Education Plan meeting notes, and post-observation conferences and notes, both staff and school leaders are accountable for follow up.
- The school has created their own quarterly Common Core-aligned individual progress reports that communicate the grade-level expectations in family-friendly language, provide benchmarks, and align to the social-emotional expectations of the school's character education program. During the parent meeting, parents praised the effective communication practices through weekly school-wide newsletters, monthly grade-level curriculum newsletters and copious informal communications via text, phone, and email. In addition, numerous curriculum nights enable parents to attend workshops that broaden their understanding of the Common Core while also providing them with strategies they can use at home to help their children. After end-of-unit assessments are completed, assessments are sent home with a cover sheet and a reflection for the parent and child to complete together and return to school, thus allowing students and parents to engage in dialogue around grade-level expectations and next steps.
- STAR, the name of this academy, is an acronym for students taking active roles while at the same time expecting students to be self-managed, team players who are accountable and respectful. This school-wide focus emphasizes self-management and communal responsibility. As a result, students regularly assess themselves using rubrics and checklists and set goals with teachers thus, increasing school-wide responsibility as evidenced by increased completion of class work and homework.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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**Findings**

Teachers work successfully in team structures to share best practices, analyze student data and artifacts, develop tools to strategically measure student progression toward the standards, make adjustments to the curriculum and plan for instruction.

**Impact**

Teacher collaboration has deeply built coherence within and across grades resulting in improvements in pedagogy and opportunities for continuous growth for all students. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A strong professional learning community exists at the school. Teachers regularly engage in professional collaborations that support instructional goals, strengthen teacher capacity and support a positive culture of trust. A teacher said, "We have very teacher-driven teams and greatly appreciate the input of our assistant principal whom we deeply trust." During weekly professional learning time and scheduled grade team meetings, teachers engage in analyzing student work, aligning lessons and units across grades and subjects, sharing instructional practices, and ensuring that all instructional tasks align with the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.
- The vast majority of teachers are organized into grade-level teams, however, teachers can also elect to meet as a lower grade/upper grade team depending on the identified needs of these grades. For example, the second grade team met together with the first grade team because none of the second graders entered the grade demonstrating first grade problem solving mastery in September 2014. After student work analysis, students were regrouped in math and phonics instruction based on needs. As a result, 22% of this year's incoming second graders demonstrate first grade problem solving mastery.
- Reflecting the work of teacher teams in identifying the lowest third target population for interventions, and their refining the school's Common Core-aligned curricula in English Language Arts (ELA) and math, the school has met its targets in closing the Achievement Gap section of the School Quality Guide. Furthermore, the school exceeded targets in ELA and math for the lowest third students on the 2015 State Exams.
- Teacher survey feedback and Danielson teacher evaluations were used to design a year-long professional development plan that reflects teacher requests and needs for professional development. Teachers turn-key what they have learned independently at off-site professional development to their colleagues, thereby strengthening the distribution of leadership. In addition, all teachers serve on at least one committee to share in part of the decision-making that has an impact on the school.