



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

J.H.S. 104 Simon Baruch

Middle School M104

**330 East 21st Street
Manhattan
NY 10010**

Principal: Rocco Macri

**Date of review: December 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

J.H.S.104 Simon Baruch is a middle school with 1,112 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 40% Asian, 8% Black, 21% Hispanic, and 28% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 96.3%.

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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	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	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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations to all staff and provide multiple opportunities to support those expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicate to all parents high expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

As a result of ongoing and strategic professional learning aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, all school stakeholders feel mutually accountable for student achievement. The school successfully partners with parents so that all students make academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that teacher's professional development focuses on understanding the elements of highly effective practices such as: multiple formats of discussion; higher-order thinking and questioning; formal and informal writing opportunities; and using formative assessments to inform instruction. Staff have "unpacked" the *Danielson Framework for Teaching* and assessed the quality of their pedagogy against the rubric. Additionally, the principal provided guidance to teachers on how to provide actionable feedback to stimulate student progress. The expectation is that teachers apply to their practice their professional learning and the feedback received from school leaders, and to address their professional goals for improved instruction. These expectations, the principal shared, are consistently met.
- The school communicates student progress to parents in several ways: on their online grading platform; in teachers' email "blasts"; in homework folders; in midterm progress reports; in person during conferences and Parent Teacher Association meetings. One parent shared that this is a "great school because the work load prepares our kids for high school." If a parent emails a teacher, there is an immediate response, "my son emailed his teacher on a Sunday and she got back to him in fifteen minutes." The online *Class Dojo* program provides explanatory links for every lesson so that parents can support their children at home. As one parent noted, "I don't have to fully understand the math because of the support system the school provides." Several parents, whose children graduated from the school, shared that their children are exceeding expectations in high school as a result of school leader and teacher commitment and partnership with parents.
- The principal sends out *Baruch Weekly* to inform teachers of upcoming professional development opportunities, to highlight instructional expectations, and to offer research-based instructional support. Current topics include: assessment: a key to differentiation; responding to the needs of all students; and a research-based four-step progression protocol for teaching students how to independently analyze texts to synthesize understanding. Similarly, the *Baruch Blast* goes out to all parents to remind them of upcoming events and workshops. The Parent-Teacher Association hosts professional learning for parents in the writing process or ways to use Study Island resources to support their children.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Most teaching practices and academic tasks reflect a set of beliefs that are grounded in engaging all students in challenging work and discussions that foster higher-order thinking. However, instructional strategies do not reflect optimal use of high quality instructional supports or extensions that enrich discussion.

Impact

As a result, there are missed opportunities for students to fully engage in high levels of student-to-student collaboration and ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that the set of beliefs about how students learn best was arrived at collaboratively with input from all school stakeholders: “Students achieve academic success when they are challenged to make their thinking visible through discussion, collaborations and exposure to rigorous learning activities.” He adds that this happens when differentiated instruction supports student access to challenging tasks. Therefore, expanding upon current differentiated practices has been an instructional focus this year. To this end, in a seventh grade chemistry class, students were asked to identify key words to use when conducting research and developing a hypothesis. All students jotted and, when the teacher asked them to share with a partner, they did so. One student offered, “It wouldn’t help if he tested different companies; he should test the same brand, and then it would be a fair test.” This led the teacher to review independent and dependent variables prior to engaging students in designing a group background research plan to include text analysis and citing relevant evidence in the reasoning of the hypothesis. While the teacher provided support prior to setting students to task, the principal wondered if all students needed this level of scaffolding and review as several students seemed ready to take on the task’s challenge, but waited for the teacher to complete the review.
- In a sixth grade math class, a student shared his mathematical process for drawing a diagram to represent a numerical expression on the interactive whiteboard. Students discussed the process and a second approach to the same problem surfaced – use an array. Students readily offered feedback, “I can tell what he was thinking, he split up the six to make it two plus three, but multiplied wrong.” Students were deeply engaged in the lesson, but the bulk of the discussion was between the teacher and individual students. On the other hand, in a sixth grade science class, students learned about cells and their functions by moving through a series of stations that used different mediums to share information: video; several informational texts; music; and visuals. The teacher provided an extension activity for students who completed all stations. This, however, was not a consistent practice in the vast majority of classrooms visited.
- The Socratic seminar in a seventh grade English class offered all students opportunity to take full charge of a discussion comparing the movie version of the novel, *The Outsiders*, to the text. The discussion was grounded in students’ prepared questions. All students were deeply engaged and had a role to play whether they were in the inner or outer circle. The teacher provided cards for students whom she knew had a hard time participating in discussions. They were instructed to raise the card to indicate that they had something to contribute.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leaders and teachers ensure that all curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts, and embed higher-order skills and thinking across grades and subjects.

Impact

As a result of this cohesive and targeted focus on rigorous habits, emphasized in all curricula and tasks, students are given consistent opportunities to demonstrate their thinking, and are, therefore, well prepared for college and career.

Supporting Evidence

- Common Core-aligned curricular maps outline teacher-created units of study and are evident across grades and content areas. For example, a seventh grade social studies map includes content, skills, assessments, and the literacy focus – classifying and sequencing, and annotating and paraphrasing a text. Skills increase in rigor as the year progresses from unit to unit. Mid-year, students are expected to determine importance and understand text structure, and by the close of the year, to determine validity and evaluate evidence. In the English Language Arts curricula, students begin the year writing narratives and journal entries, and move to “establishing claims on a controversial issue and articulating counterclaims that directly oppose contention” by October through December. Additionally, students in the eighth grade write document-based essays in preparation for high school.
- All students have opportunity to demonstrate their thinking because of consistent exposure to rigorous habits such as: annotating informational texts; responding to guided questions throughout research; and using a variety of graphic organizers to process and reflect on evidence gathered. For example, in three classrooms and in curricular documents reviewed, teachers set up stations for students to gather evidence to support or counter a claim, or to learn about a new topic. One teacher shared that when she realized that assigning an essay when students have completed a text, made writing “just a final product.” She revisited the task so that students have ongoing opportunities to capture big ideas throughout their reading process. The informal writing served to contribute to the final essay.
- An English Language Arts on-demand performance task requires students to write an argumentative essay in response to the Second Amendment: “A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” To prepare, students annotated a New York Times opinion piece with terms such as: interpretation, claim, and reason with evidence, after which they responded to questions to help crystallize their position: What do gun advocates/gun enthusiasts argue? A history task required students to identify the struggles of life in the New World of Old World immigrants. Students studied a cross-section of documents to generate and prioritize the three main struggles facing immigrants in pre-World War I America. Students identified clues within each document, considered the roles of government, anarchists, and reformers.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Assessment practices and rubrics are consistently aligned to curricula and offer all teachers a clear picture of student progress toward goals and their mastery of standards across grades and subjects.

Impact

This results in ongoing adjustments to instruction and curricula, and students who receive meaningful feedback to support increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that a common assessment practice is to administer benchmark assessments to measure student progress toward mastery of standards. Teachers submit benchmark scores into Google Docs so that all staff, students, and principal have access to the data, and see the full scope of individual student progress and mastery. The school's grading policy is included in all content areas. The principal noted that content teams have developed timelines for benchmark administration, and that teachers then analyze the results to identify performance patterns. Additionally, these assessments are created in a variety of formats to measure student growth across skill areas in writing such as: argument; exposition; lab reports; and short response.
- Rubrics accompany all assessments and tasks, and have been used to ensure that expectations for student work are clearly defined, skills and progress toward proficiency are measurable, and teachers track student growth over time. One student shared that the task rubrics "show us what we need to do to exceed the standards." Teachers' actionable feedback aligned to the rubric was evident on all student work. Additionally, students articulated what they need to do to improve their writing: work on transitions for better flow; expand upon the significance of wealth and power; keep details aligned to thesis; work on a conclusion; and include a counterclaim and evidence to support it.
- Student portfolios are another common way that students are assessed for their growth over time. The portfolio assessments have been standardized to include common products such as: first to final drafts of writing and rubrics with teacher feedback. One student shared that the portfolios not only help to organize your work, but also to have something that really shows your progress at the end of the year." The portfolio reflection page requires students to consider where they have improved. For example, one student articulated that his reasoning has improved because, "I can easily explain how an example supports a claim." In order to improve in this area, the student said he would have to strengthen his claim and "...check that my evidence and reasoning are very clear."
- The math team designed a mathematical discussion rubric to embed mathematical thinking into their curricula and instruction so that students have a clear understanding of how to construct a viable argument, use mathematical terminology, and express their ideas clearly.

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

Teachers collaborate in inquiry-based professional collaborations to analyze their practice as well as student work and assessment data for students they share. Teachers are leaders in the school.

Impact

As a result of teachers working in teams, their instructional capacity has increased and students are making progress toward mastery of goals. Teachers play an invaluable role in making decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal stated that this year teams are focusing on three inquiry cycles on differentiated practices: planning; process; and product. Therefore, content teams modify tasks and curricula to support all learners. For example, one math benchmark task that required students to construct a table of values to solve a problem using a “guess and check” approach, justify the reasonableness of the solution, and solve the problem graphically was revised to include prompt questions, a visual, several tables for gathering and organizing data, and a specific place for writing the justification; none of these supports were in the previous task. Similarly, when the math team analyzed data for their incoming fifth graders, and learned that there were students who did not meet the fifth grade standard in fractions, they revised their unit so that all students, whether high or low performers, would be on track to master the standards. This move to provide greater support for English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and high performers was evident in curricula documents across content areas.
- Grade teams meet to discuss a common set of students and determine action plans to support each student. Teachers share that the school’s embedded practice of looking at student work and this year’s spotlight on differentiation focuses their work on student progress, and ways to increase it. For example, a history teacher shared that being able to sit with six colleagues to analyze assessments and curricula with a focus on differentiating for English Language Learners helped her to provide her students with “manageable entry points,” reflection opportunities, and daily exit slips to gather data on students’ understanding. Her goal is to build independence and increase participation. Another teacher shared that because the team reviews assessment data so frequently, students have a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. In the sixth grade team meeting, teachers reviewed a task, its rubric, and student work representing three skill levels. After review, teachers reflected on the task: “Were the bullets a little too stifling?”; “Was the article too confusing?” Teachers wondered if they were clear enough in what they were asking students to do. They agreed to teach the structure of the task, and to check for students’ prior knowledge of the science concept.
- Teacher leaders are a part of the instructional cabinet, and, according to the principal, are “our think tank.” They develop and deliver professional development, and bring feedback from their peers to the cabinet for discussion. Several teachers participated in a set of teacher leadership workshops and brought their new knowledge of facilitative leadership to their work with department leads. The principal shared that without our teachers’ perspective, the writing initiative “would not have happened.”