



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**P.S. 123 Mahalia Jackson**

**Elementary - Middle School M123**

**301 West 140 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10030**

**Principal: Melitina Hernandez**

**Date of review: March 11, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

## The School Context

P. S. 123 Mahalia Jackson is an elementary - middle school with 556 students from grade kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 53% Black, 40% Hispanic, and 4% White students. The student body includes 17% English Language Learners and 21% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 87.7%.

## 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>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>Developing</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

The school leader ensures that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills for all students.

### Impact

School leaders and staff make purposeful decisions to build instructional coherence, emphasize higher-order skills in tasks, and promote college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- While the school implements the *ReadyGen* curricula in kindergarten through second grade, modifications were made to better support all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities. For example, upon examination it was determined that units did not include time for independent reading, strategies were not based on “just right” books, and the focus on retelling and summarizing texts was not challenging enough. This resulted in teachers building in independent and guided reading blocks during which teachers consistently confer with all students while providing opportunities for students to read at their levels. Additionally, the principal noted being read to “is not how we learn to read. Students need to practice comprehension strategies as they read.”
- The third through eighth grade reading and writing curricula emphasize rigorous content, scaffolds to support students, and long- and short-term targets. Adjustments were made to ensure that students had access to complex texts by first building their comprehension capacity. Therefore, instead of starting the term with *The Lightning Thief*, a more complex text specified in the original unit plan, teachers started with *Bud Not Buddy* to provide time for students to practice chunking the text and stretching words. Additionally, in order to support second graders with reading *Charlotte’s Web*, teachers recognized that they would have to find a place in the curricula to provide students with the context for rural life, and therefore, aligned their curricula with social studies.
- Teachers determined that the *Go Math!* curricula did not provide adequate time to address concepts such as number decomposing or if parallel lines intersect. After a review of assessment data indicated that students needed more time to build fluency, teachers revised the math scope and sequence to include more time for practicing computation skills. Teachers implement aspects of *Engage NY* curricula to ensure rigorous skills are consistently addressed for high performers.
- Over the course of a social studies unit focused on industrialization, students were required to maintain a journal from the perspective of an immigrant coming to America in the late 1800s, including evidence from texts read, photographs depicting immigrants’ lives and work, and research conducted. Students learned about terms specific to the time period such as sweatshop, muckrakers, and suffrage, and midway through the study, students reflected on what they had learned to make predictions about how these events may lead to progressive reform. This resulted in a final writing product that explained the changes that occurred in policy and society during this time period time in the United States.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices inconsistently provide multiple entry points into curricula to engage all learners. Students were unevenly engaged in classroom discussions.

### Impact

There were limited opportunities for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills or high levels of thinking and participation in classroom discussions.

### Supporting Evidence

- Eighth grade social studies students worked in groups reading a selection of texts about the Gilded Age. Each group's texts represented a different issue that arose from the changes that occurred post-reconstruction. Students took notes on a graphic organizer after the teacher modeled how to fill it out. They annotated each text and were required to teach each other what they learned. Struggling readers and English Language Learners were paired with stronger readers. Groups were expected to collectively agree on the most pressing issue. In several groups, students shared one fact from their reading, and ended their discussion. However, students had limited opportunity to push each other to elaborate on what they shared, or to encourage each other to offer additional information.
- In a science classroom, students selected the body system they felt was most important. The teacher asked students to share their claim and the evidence to support it in a whole group discussion prior to writing their argumentative essays. The teacher took notes as she moved from student to student capturing their ideas, such as, one student "shared an experience with a nail infection after biting her nails" and another student "shared her experience when she lost her incisors at age four." The teacher also recorded which students did not participate in the whole group discussion. In this lesson, more than any other, students had the opportunity to engage with each other in a discussion for which they were well prepared. However, student responses were directed to the teacher, and not to each other, limiting learners' ability to demonstrate high levels of participation or challenge each other's thinking.
- During a math discussion about determining the area of a model, a math teacher flashed a number on the interactive whiteboard to cold call students. As students offered responses, the teacher encouraged them to expand upon what they said. Students worked in partnerships to create equivalent expressions using the distributive property and supported each other collegially. When students got stuck, the teacher asked questions to help students unpack their misunderstanding. Although the teacher made the attempt to put the problem solving in students' hands, ultimately, he provided the correct solution. Similarly, in an English Language Arts class, the teacher modeled creating a bubble map to capture character traits first using himself as a model, then with a character from the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, before instructing students to work in groups to create their own bubble maps for a character of their choice. While the principal pointed out that this lesson was an outgrowth of students' struggle with identifying character traits, the activity did not lead to students challenging each other's thinking, or to high levels of student participation.

## Additional Findings

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

Across classrooms teachers use assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals.

### Impact

Common assessments are used to provide students with actionable feedback on their achievement, and teachers track student progress to inform instructional and curricular adjustments.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers implement the *Fountas and Pinnell* reading assessments to determine high leverage next steps to support student readers such as consistent conferencing, chunking text, and close reading. This focus resulted in students' increased ability to construct arguments because of their heightened understanding of the text. Students are writing in greater volume and explaining their reasoning. All teachers analyze writing benchmarks to guide instructional foci; currently, for example, the focus is on word choice and sentence fluency in fourth grade. Similarly, after analysis of math assessment data, the focus is on number composition and "strategy groupings" by students' skill need.
- Teachers track student progress on teacher-created spreadsheets that the principal monitors to hold teachers accountable for student achievement. This supports teachers with strategic action planning for students who are on the cusp of meeting standards for example, abstract thinking and independent work. Additionally, all teachers maintain data analysis sheets on which they reflect on student progress in targeted skills or traits. For example, after the first benchmark assessment, a sixth grade teacher focused her instruction on ideas, voice, grammar and spelling. When students made gains as measured by the second benchmark assessment, she was able to focus more deeply on ideas, but also began to work on sentence fluency. After reflecting, teachers identify next steps such as more exposure to mentor texts and figurative language.
- Teachers provide students with feedback in one-on-one conferences during work time, and maintain this data in binders across all grades. Feedback on work products is aligned to the Teachers College writing rubrics, and teachers create checklists to make the rubric criteria accessible to all students as a process document for self-assessment. Teachers also use the writing continuum and exemplars to support students in writing leads, using transitions, and writing strong endings. The rubrics also include grade level criteria. Therefore, first and second grade students have access to how their writing could meet the standards of a third or fourth grader. Such transparency and the use of exemplars motivates students to improve their writing.
- All teachers engage in data conferences at which they are required to share analysis of the progress of a targeted group of students, reflect on their plan for strategic grouping, and offer an action plan that differentiates support. Teachers shared that this analysis protocol helps them to predetermine guided reading groups, and to target particular traits based on student need. One teacher offered that after narrowing her focus to three traits, she saw sixth grade student progress on the writing benchmark from its first implementation to January.

<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 and provide training aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to all staff. School leaders and staff successfully communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness to all families.

### Impact

Ongoing professional training provides all teachers with a system of accountability that help maintain the high expectations set by school leaders. All families receive ongoing feedback to support their children’s progress toward expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal’s instructional expectations are made clear in the school’s handbook that includes the expectation that all teachers implement the workshop model using the ‘I do, we do, you do’ method, provide students with clear task expectations, connect all teaching points to an essential question, and create pacing calendars that map out units by day and week. In weekly meetings, teachers get targeted feedback to improve the use of questioning and discussion, and strategies for challenging student thinking. The discussions focus on how students are being challenged. This supports teachers with creating or revising personal and professional goals to improve practice and meet the high academic expectations set.
- The principal and her instructional cabinet introduced the text, *The CAFE Book: Engaging All Students in Daily Literary Assessment and Instruction*, to focus on students owning their knowledge and next steps. Students create bookmarks on which they record reading targets such as “work on phonics so I can understand the words I am reading” or “work on identifying the cause and effect of a story.” Professional learning sessions are informed by observation trends. One session focused on what data reveals about student learning, and was differentiated by grade level so that, for example, kindergarten through second grade teachers focused on early reading skills, oral language development connected to writing, and conferring. New teachers participate in an ongoing support group to engage in topics such as connecting feedback to student engagement, supporting students in independent centers, and structuring small group discussions. Additionally, all teachers receive weekly staff notes that include instructional strategies such as providing clear explanations, and what school leaders will be looking for during instructional rounds.
- Teachers facilitate workshops for families regarding strategies for helping students with homework and at-home reading. They offer information on reading behaviors and blends, and provide home reading cards. Parents shared their challenge with understanding the Common Core curricula, but noted that teachers “show us the way to help our kids at home.” Parents also receive weekly communications in their child’s backpack and in mailings that include website resources for at-home reading and math activities, and tips for “How I Can Help My Child.” Although parent participation at the ongoing workshops offered is still an area the school is working on, the number of parents attending parent teacher conferences has increased from last year’s 359 to this year’s 411. Open classroom Tuesdays began in November. Parents reach out to teachers to gain an understanding of what their children are learning and feel confident that when they reach out to teachers they are heard. As one parent said, “It all comes down to us, we are the cornerstones in their lives.”

<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 engage in structured, professional collaborations to promote school goals and Common Core Learning Standard implementation. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share.

### Impact

Teachers' instructional practices are improved, and all students are making progress toward goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- The newly formed instructional cabinet meets weekly with the school leader to promote instructional consistency. In an inquiry into the school's conferring practices, the cabinet met multiple times to determine practices in place, and then to decide what conferring needs to look like across classrooms. The team created a conferring system which requires all teachers to maintain binders to track student progress. This is now a coherent school-wide practice. After recognizing that *Fountas and Pinnell* levels were not moving, the principal and her team created grade-level literacy centers based on skill need. As a result, 10 of 12 students in one class improved from the first to the second benchmark.
- In the fifth grade team meeting, teachers looked at three students' work products to discuss strengths and challenges, identify common patterns, and determine next steps. Notably, students were organized, followed the task steps, showed fluency in writing conclusions, and one student successfully incorporated transition words in her writing. However, two of the three students did not use transition words and all the students needed work on expanding their descriptions, and strengthening mechanics. Teachers came to consensus on strategies to support their learners across content areas, discuss the rubric with students so that there is greater clarity, and work with individual students on elaboration. As a result of these findings, teachers adjusted their upcoming unit on research-based argument writing to offer differentiated checklists to build students' background knowledge so that they are more confident in oral debates, and provide instruction and practice for students in elaboration and word choice. This, they agreed, would also provide purpose when conferring. Prior to this meeting, the team had revised their pacing calendars, and purposefully emphasized tier three vocabulary words for their English as a New Language Learners.
- The third grade team uses the *Teachers College Writing Development Continuum* as a lens for looking at student work in order to align teaching points to specific indicators. Team members shared their belief that this was the best way to assess students writing skills. This is also the venue for discussing purposeful student groupings by skill need. The second grade team focused on ways to check for understanding, and how to consistently provide multiple entry points into content. Lesson study notes indicated that this team also realized that they need to consider what students need to know prior to the lesson, have prepared questions embedded in their lesson plans, and pose a question to capture student interest prior to starting the lesson. To push students' ownership of their reading experience, they also agreed to model asking how and why questions. Teachers recognize the value in collaborating, as one teacher shared, "We are not planning in isolation, we are fully aware of what our students are doing across classrooms."