



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P. S. 149 Sojourner Truth

**Elementary-Middle School M149
41 West 117 Street
Manhattan
NY 10026**

Principal: Claudia Aguirre

**Date of review: March 15, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

P. S. 149 Sojourner Truth is an elementary-middle school with 285 students from grade prekindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 64% Black, 27% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 30% 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 90.6%.

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	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	Focus	Developing
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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The principal has introduced a set of high academic expectations to the entire staff aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Teacher teams and school leadership establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations to all students.

Impact

Professional learning opportunities support all faculty members in meeting the high expectations set so that teachers are accountable for student progress and students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- In September 2015, the principal started her first year by engaging in informal observations to gather trends in instructional practices. This alerted her to how each classroom was “a different land” and the need for schoolwide instructional coherence. This analysis of instructional trends informed the school’s new instructional expectations that all curricula documents align to the Common Core Learning Standards, offer clear objectives that are consistently assessed for student progress, and that students engage in collaborative work. These expectations were evident across most classrooms. In order to support her teachers with meeting her expectations, the principal held individual meetings with teachers. Consequently, professional learning is grounded in modeling effective classroom practice. “I model skillful teaching and implement the tools that should be used in the classroom for students with disabilities and English Language Learners.” Additionally, the principal brought triads of teachers together to determine how they will meet expectations in behavior management, work time, and the different learning needs for each grade to support collaboration and leadership among teachers.
- All students receive weekly progress reports that provide them with ongoing access to their grades and data to inform their goal setting. This level of information also supports students with preparing for student-led conferences with their teacher and family member, during which they follow a script that includes explanations for highest and lowest grades, how to improve study habits, and goals for the upcoming trimester. As part of this process, teachers are provided with guidance to support their role in monitoring success and resolving academic difficulties. For the meeting, parents are provided with a checklist to serve as a guide and they receive a folder that includes academic alerts, flyers, progress reports, and the school calendar.
- All third through eighth graders meet weekly in advisory where they examine and learn to apply respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work (REACH) values. Students complete a rubric once a semester to guide them in meeting expectations and setting academic goals monitored by their advisors. Teachers provide students with checklists to assess accomplishments they made throughout a unit, and the reading and writing skills necessary to improve. This new system has already yielded a marked increase in homework completion, and as the principal shared, students recognizing that effort is valued. Students complete homework during Extended Learning Time, thus providing them more time for reading at home. One parent noted her daughter’s excitement and that if she arrives early for pick up, her daughter will let her know that “she can’t leave, she has to attend.”

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into curricula for all students, and do not sufficiently engage students in high levels of discussion.

Impact

There were uneven opportunities for students, including English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and high performers to have access into the curricula or for them to show evidence of higher order thinking in discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- In a science classroom, students were paired by ability level to engage in the study of plants. One pair created sentences using an array of words on their table and transferred this to the written page. A second pair of students labeled the parts of a plant, and a third pair worked with vocabulary cards. Learning goals taped to all desks read, "I can write across three pages" and "I can read independently for seven minutes." All learning goals were identical. During work time, the teacher sat with different pairs of students, asked probing questions, and brought in a bamboo plant to illuminate their learning. Students in this classroom were provided with multiple entry points into the content, and received targeted work based on their need.
- In a math classroom where data surfaced that students were struggling with understanding the concepts of least and most, the teacher retaught this by engaging students in a Do Now activity that connected the concept to their lives. The set of least and most statements were based on a grocery store's items, and the teacher used this strategy to begin a discussion of what least and most is relative to the items. Students were instructed to pair up and transfer the statements into inequalities such as, $R < 5$. However, although students were instructed to collaborate during this start up activity, most worked independently. The teacher checked in and reminded students that "If you have at least five, think about that." When she brought the class together, she directed the discussion, and completed the handout on the interactive white board. Students sat quietly watching. Therefore, there were limited opportunities for students to interact, grapple with content collaboratively, or push each other's thinking.
- Fourth graders viewed a primary source image of the Constitutional Convention and were asked to describe what they saw. Students recognized George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, noted that there were delegates present, and were then grouped to build their learning with additional documents pertinent to the topic. Given that the teacher posed most questions, as was the case across classrooms, there were fewer opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking during whole class discussions.
- In many classrooms, routines and structures were in place, but often led to little student involvement in their learning beyond adhering to teacher directives. For example, in a math class, students worked from a *Go Math!* workbook, copying problem-solving steps into their notebooks, and responding to the teacher's questions chorally. This approach did not provide time for students to work collaboratively, thus limiting opportunity for students to engage in productive struggle or to raise questions regarding the work. This strategy also missed opportunities to provide high achievers with well-matched extension activities.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks emphasize rigorous habits.

Impact

Purposeful instructional decisions have built instructional coherence to benefit all students, and tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has created an instructional calendar to serve as a tool for planning that makes transparent what is to be taught from grade to grade and across content areas. Teachers use this calendar to communicate with each other and to plan across grades and departments. Teachers also design curricula maps aligned to the calendar, and place emphasis on where students are and what they learned previously. The emphasis on reading and writing across subjects was evident across content curricula documents reviewed, such as guided notes so students can record what they see when they look at the sky, facts they already know and to consider why “we can’t see stars in the daytime” in science. In a math lesson plan students were to write justifications for problem solutions, and a history task provided a note-taking guide for students to respond to images, quotes, and text excerpts.
- In order to deepen student learning and increase rigor in curricula and tasks, teachers focus on a progression of skills from basic to advanced levels, such as synthesizing two points of view, or for fourth and fifth grade students, to consider the different ways characters react to events. Similarly, math lesson plans require students to engage in tasks that invite multiple approaches for problem solving such as analyzing a checking account transaction log for math errors, or describing two ways to find the total number of bones in two ankles. Similarly, in a sixth grade math task students apply their math knowledge to writing inequalities connected to a grocery store giving reusable bags to customers who donate to a charity. The exploratory practice in the lesson builds fluency and culminates in students articulating how they will know when a person receives a free bag. Additionally, students are provided with opportunities to “unlock the problem” by posing a process question such as, “How do you know which operation to use?”
- A social studies task reviewed indicated that after students research the effects of World War I propaganda and the mixed loyalties felt by Americans, they create posters to demonstrate their understanding of the role propaganda played in the mindsets of United States citizens. This requires students to target their audience, and to choose an issue to address such as army enlistment, food preservation, or joining the Red Cross. Similarly, science lesson plans include research on a famous landform and writing informative essays to share what they learned.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that align to the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals.

Impact

Teachers share student performance data with each other and their students so that students understand their achievements. Teachers adjust their curricula and instruction to meet student need.

Supporting Evidence

- Staff analyzed baseline data in math, science, social studies, and English Language Arts (ELA), to create a common lens for student support. The data revealed that students struggle with writing stamina across subjects. Teachers discussed how to address this and decided to provide students with independent work time to write for a sustained period. This also resulted in adjusting the content of formal midterms to include more opportunities for students to practice writing short responses, and provide data for teachers to assess student progress. For example, history exams now include visual documents and text excerpts with open-ended questions from which students cull information for a short response to align to the focus on writing stamina across subjects. Another teacher shared that an additional benefit has been reflected in current assessments where students have made gains in analyzing graphs and primary source documents. Teachers collaboratively score the assessments that are aligned to rubric criteria and offer students rubric-based feedback on their work.
- The principal has made a priority of replicating practices that middle school students will be exposed to in high school, such as on-demand writing, midterms, and final exams. In addition, exams have been redesigned to include the Common Core Standard to which each question is aligned. Standards are included on the front page of all exams so that when students get their exams back they know which standards they met or which they did not.
- Several support structures are in place to inform students of their progress toward reading and writing goals as a result of all teachers tracking their progress. For example, students meet with their teachers to discuss their running records' accomplishments. This supports teachers with creating students groups based on reading level. Therefore, English Language Learners, high performers, and students performing at grade level get targeted support based on areas of need. Additionally, teachers have created a student-friendly gradebook tracker that indicates how students are progressing in reading workshop, writing workshop, math, science, and social studies.
- After assessing running record data and noting that students were not meeting benchmarks, teachers created guided reading groups tiered by reading level. This allowed more time for one-on-one conferencing with struggling readers, and, as one teacher offered, "I learned to step back and internalize what students say," to determine whether or not what she is teaching is deepening student understanding. Additionally, the Academic Intervention Service (AIS) specialist implements the Reading Rescue program with groups of students. In records reviewed, students who received this support moved up one to two reading levels. In a classroom visited students pointed to their reading progress posted on the wall.

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

The majority of teachers engage in structured professional collaborations that promote the school’s focus on instructional coherence. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share.

Impact

Teacher collaborations result in stronger instructional capacity, improved teacher practice, and progress for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has made key decisions to ensure that all teacher teams meet regularly to look at student work using the Teachers College writing rubric and to review assessment data. The principal provides additional periods for common planning time and has paired middle school and elementary teachers for team-teaching partnerships in order to promote instructional coherence. The purpose of these pairings is to offer extended professional learning and collaboration, and to provide elementary teachers with access to upper grade content to strengthen instructional cohesion. This also creates an increased understanding for staff of what students need to know to be successful in middle school. Consequently, these practices inform planning decisions at the classroom and school level. As one teacher offered, “it is nice to piggy-back off of what is taught and to learn about practices I hadn’t thought about.”
- Members of teacher teams discussed their commitment to building schoolwide instructional coherence. One teacher shared that “out of disparate opinions we are striving for consistency from grades kindergarten through 8 so that the kinds of questions and assessments are shared throughout the building.” Another teacher noted that in an effort to move students’ math scores, “My team models problem solving and discussions that highlight math thinking in all of our lessons.”
- During the ELA middle school grade team meeting, the focus was on norming students’ short response exam scores aligned to a checklist. Questions included whether or not details provided were specific enough, or if the student understood the difference between a claim and an inference. The team also focused on how to support students who are below grade level in reading comprehension so they are better equipped to respond to on-demand short response exam prompts. It was agreed that teachers need to model for students the process of gathering evidence from a text. Additionally, they agreed to create student partnerships so that students can support each other as they work. The team’s prior meeting minutes indicated that teachers sharpened their focus to moving Level 2 students to a Level 3. This resulted in a shared decision to design an instructional plan for teaching extended response writing.