



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

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Yorkville Community School**

**Elementary School M151**

**421 East 88<sup>th</sup> Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10128**

**Principal: Samantha Kaplan**

**Date of review: November 24, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

## The School Context

Yorkville Community School is an elementary school with 548 students from grade kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 7% Asian, 14% Black, 27% Hispanic, and 47% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 93.8%.

## 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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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

The school's thematic-based units of study are CCLS-aligned and strategically address the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks are refined based on ongoing analysis of student progress and work products.

### Impact

Curricular coherence provides students with skills needed for college and career readiness. The focus on refining curricula results in tasks that deeply engage students across ability levels.

### Supporting Evidence

- All students engage in thematic-based research studies that emphasize gleaning evidence to support a research topic from informational texts, and analyzing historical literature. For example, in a fourth grade unit on Colonial America, students focus both on the time period and realistic historical fiction. One of the tasks requires students to gather text evidence to discover a character's nature. Students also create maps of explorers that highlight routes followed, study photographs and paintings, and use a variety of resources to research the period. The culminating writing task asks students to apply their new learning to compare and contrast Colonial times to life today. The essays that emerge from these studies follow all stages in the writing process authentically. Students brainstorm ideas, develop questions to guide their research, and learn how to organize notes on index cards and "chunk ideas together" in a first draft. Students confer with teachers and get feedback to revise their second drafts before the final stage of editing, wherein students partner to check each other for correct word wall spelling and overall mechanics. This amply prepares them for higher levels of learning.
- During conferring meetings, teachers noticed that students were not paying attention to features in informational texts which limited in-depth comprehension. This resulted in rearranging the units so that teachers could focus on how to read non-fiction text strategically prior to engaging students in their research. When first grade teachers noticed in their running records that a group of students were struggling with phonemic awareness, they immediately created tasks to support this targeted group of students. Such decision-making was evident in classrooms where groups of students worked on skills targeted to their need.
- Teachers shared that when they looked at their baseline math data, they learned that some students had already mastered concepts. This led them to create a series of open-ended tasks that would invite all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, to cognitively engage at their level. The goal in creating these tasks was to increase math conversation and deepen conceptual understandings. In reviewing student work, teachers learned that students were having difficulty with the short response and created checklists that included visual representation rubrics into checklists so that students could self-assess their work. Thus, students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities have access to the curricula and are consistently engaged in challenging tasks.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and the school's belief about how students learn best. Student work products reflect high levels of thinking.

### Impact

Teaching practices, informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, are an integral part of discussions at the team and school level. Students engage in high levels of engagement, reflected in participation and work products, however, there are missed opportunities for students to fully own their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school leader and teachers believe that students learn best when they are engaged in curricula that encourage exploration, observation, choice, and questioning. This, however, does not preclude the importance of children feeling safe to share ideas while engaging in academic and social habits for interacting with each other during work time. The school's handbook lists the qualities of a learning child: works over time; exhibits confidence; learns from others; and asks questions. In every classroom, students worked collaboratively and independently and, therefore, were consistently engaged in the social and academic skills necessary for their next educational setting. As one parent shared, "the principal strikes a balance between academic and social-emotional learning and that complements what we are doing at home."
- Students in the kindergarten, Integrated-Co-Teaching (ICT) class work at investigation stations. Students moved right to their stations upon entering the room. Some students "shopped" for independent reading texts, others engaged in a math game to practice counting, and a small group gathered around a tank to study, sketch and observe. A student in a third grade ICT class stated that she is learning to focus on one thing at a time and, therefore, records textual facts in her own words. This, she shared, helps her to prepare for her research project and to prioritize what is most important. This setting provides opportunity for high levels of thinking and participation in peer-to-peer and classroom discussions, and in written work. Additionally, all students who participated in the student meeting shared research projects, and discussed the challenge in becoming experts on a topic. The extensive writing done in writing notebooks across all grades highlights the school-wide emphasis on high quality writing.
- In a fifth grade math classroom, students were divided into two groups based on multiplication proficiency. The teacher supported students by asking them to collectively discern mistakes in a students' computation. The student was eager for the feedback and her peers helped by noting the incorrect place value. In a fourth grade literacy class, students were using their brainstorming notes and text evidence to write paragraphs. Texts were leveled. After completing their work, the teacher modeled how to self-assess writing. Using a student-friendly main idea rubric and a sample paragraph, students noted that though the paragraph contained details, and would earn a two on the rubric, they also recognized that the details did not connect to the paragraph's main idea. Therefore, in order to move up on the rubric the writer would need to revise. This resulted in students returning to their writing to assess their use of details. Such practices align to the school's beliefs about learning, and, are not yet maximized across classrooms; therefore, student ownership of their learning process is not yet an embedded practice.

## Additional Findings

<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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that strengthen their practice and promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers systematically analyze their work and assessment data for students they share.

### Impact

As a result, there is school-wide instructional coherence and all students achieve at high levels. A culture of collaboration results in improvements to teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- A fourth grade team member shared that she and her team regularly analyze assessment data and student work. For example, based on analysis of the baseline math assessment, she and her team attained an accurate read on students who were having difficulty with the short response on math assessments. As a result, the team created a series of open-ended tasks grounded in real world scenarios such as bake sales, baseball collections, or attendance at a school festival. Students are also challenged to create their own math “stories.” The result of this effort was evident in the math classrooms where students showed their mastery of mathematical thinking. Another team member shared that they implemented a fast-fact flash card routine to clarify that factors of a number are also factors of a multiple of that number. This resulted in the decision to provide manipulatives to students so they could put together smaller arrays to create bigger arrays. This made the concept visible to students.
- One teacher on the fifth grade team shared that the goal sheets the team is implementing provide a window into students’ understanding of mathematical thinking. The team collectively agreed to continue their focus on grouping, but to start tightly, emphasize modeling, and then gradually release responsibility to students.
- In discussions with teachers, they shared that their team collaborations go beyond the appropriated time. They meet over lunch, during common planning times, and conduct mini-reviews of each other’s classrooms. This is done to support a new teacher or to model a practice a colleague is struggling to implement. When a new teacher was not sure how to manage Chromebooks, her colleague made time to show her. Additionally, one teacher stated that the consistent, collaborative culture reinforces the idea that effective teaching is an ongoing learning process: “We all came into this knowing we need to make it exciting for kids and to be open to learning.” Thus, teachers take the lead on building each other’s practice.

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

Common assessments make clear student progress and mastery across grades and subjects. Assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding.

### Impact

As a result of tracking all students' progress through multiple systems, all students demonstrate increased mastery. Ongoing checks for understanding provide ample opportunity for teachers to make effective instructional adjustments and for students to articulate their next learning steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that all teachers maintain running records and reading, writing and math trackers that monitor student progress. School-wide spreadsheets outline and track the Common Core Learning Standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and alert teachers to what students need to know and be able to do over the year. The math team tracks student progress on skills such as estimation. All teachers have data binders that create a portrait of student progress in reading, writing and math. For example, in reviewing Teachers College assessment data, the first grade teachers recognized that their bottom third students were struggling with phonemic awareness. This resulted in the decision to implement *Foundations*, and, one teacher shared that 15 out of 17 students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, made significant gains from September to November.
- Student-friendly checklists aligned to project rubrics enabled students to self-assess their work and take ownership of their progress. One teacher shared that this made it easier for her to recognize gaps in student understanding. Across classrooms, teachers checked for understanding using exit slips, writing prompts, and thumbs up or down. Teachers frequently checked in with students working in small groups to assess their understanding of the task and their approach to it. One teacher shared that after conferring with students she learned that they were skipping over text features in informational texts. When she shared this with her team, they agreed to reorder the units to include tasks that build a foundation for reading informational texts. This necessary adjustment prepared students for upcoming research units.
- Students confer with teachers to set goals for improvement. In one classroom, two posted goals read: "to read a section of the book and state the main idea" and "to be more specific with my details." In a third-grade science classroom, the teacher checked in with a group of students and recorded goals mastered and areas for support. One student mastered estimates, recording data, and answering questions, but the teacher recorded that the student was still unsure about making and keeping relationships. Another student mastered balance, recording data, and comparing, and would need to work on reasonable estimates. The focus on conferring strengthened teacher practice, and all students receive targeted support and are aware of their next learning steps.
- Fourth grade students work in three-leveled math groups based on last year's assessments. Teachers felt that the math levels determined by the assessments did not provide an accurate picture of students' conceptual mastery. Teachers spoke excitedly of student progress because the same curricula and standards are taught and met, but students have opportunity to make progress at an individualized pace as they do in reading.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. All parents are consistently informed of the school's high expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness.

### Impact

Extensive support and training secure clarity on expectations and create a culture wherein all teachers hold themselves accountable for student progress in meeting expectations. Strong partnerships with parents result in all students making progress in meeting the high expectations set for them.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership articulates high academic expectations that are understood and owned by all teachers. The expectations are stated in the staff handbook, and school leaders attend meetings to reinforce expectations. School leaders have regular checks-ins regarding student progress and goal setting, and assess mastery using kid-friendly checklists aligned to rubrics. The principal makes clear that students must own their learning, respect is reciprocal, and risk-taking valued. It is also expected that curricula revision is ongoing and thus, teachers receive training in *Foundations*, unit planning, and analyzing student work to plan strategy groups.
- When students were not meeting expectations on the short response in the reading assessment, the school leaders brought third to fifth grade teachers together to take the exam. In this way, they could determine what they do as adult readers to meet the requirements. As a result, teachers reviewed their practice to see if what they were asking students to do was aligned to the assessment task and their rubrics. They learned that their focus on teaching students to provide details in their writing was not enough. Even their high level readers and writers were competently doing this, but not answering the exam question. This resulted in revising the rubrics, revisiting the way short responses are taught, and focusing on reading comprehension strategies.
- Parents are empowered to partner with teachers to support their children. The fifth grade team sends exit slips home for parents to sign. This provides parents with a window into the day's work and an opportunity to follow up. Teachers educate parents on how to check homework, how to practice multi-step word problems, and how to help their child in reading. For example, parents are instructed to make sure their child reads for an uninterrupted period and on completion, to ask their child to summarize and describe a part they liked or were confused by. This generates the assigned reading response: make an inference and support it with details. This led to parents requesting to see models of what the teachers expect, and now this is embedded into all work sent home.
- Parents are welcomed into classrooms to take a part in lessons on monthly Family Fridays. Monthly newsletters inform parents of curricula decisions, new programs, grading policy, and enrichment opportunities for their children. In the November newsletter, for example, the principal shared the system for tracking student progress in meeting the Common Core Learning Standards over the course of the year. Additionally, parents receive newsletters for each grade that indicate what their children will be focused on in reading, writing, and math.