



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S.163 Alfred E. Smith

Elementary School M163

**163 West 97th Street
Manhattan
NY 10025**

Principal: Donny Lopez

**Date of review: November 18, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepcion**

The School Context

P.S. 163 Alfred E. Smith is an elementary school with 588 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 6% Asian, 16% Black, 46% Hispanic, and 27% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 14% students with disabilities. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.9%.

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	Celebration	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	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	Additional Findings	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and strategically integrate the instructional shifts across grades and content. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student data.

Impact

All students are exposed to rigorous, Common Core-aligned curriculum where task deliberately engage them in student discourse involving the instructional shifts and tailored to ensure all students are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has strategically selected and blended various curricula including Go Math with Exemplars in order to have students involved in mathematical conversations that reinforce fluency, deep understanding and practice with writing and solving math word problems. *ReadyGen* has been blended with Teachers' College to ensure that students participate in revised writing and produce long, fluid pieces instead of just short response. A grade 2 Exemplar lesson on Operations and Algebraic Thinking asked students to provide two strategies and provide reasoning and proof when solving a problem involving the number of legs with ten spiders and six lady bugs.
- The school modified the "Senderos" Spanish language program by aligning it to the Common Core Learning Standards and including the instructional shifts in order to use it for the kindergarten to grade 5 dual language program. The school also created learning targets as "I can statements" in Spanish aligned to the grade appropriate standards, such as a grade 4 unit with a learning target of "I can analyze the text and use diagrams to learn about the illustrations." The school made strategic decisions to use non-fiction texts and to incorporate the use of the instructional shifts such as close reading, a focus on academic vocabulary instruction and replaced the comprehension and retell questions with text dependent questions.
- As a result of looking at student work, many lessons include a section that lists possible student misconceptions and includes strategies to address them. For example, in a grade 4 social studies lesson on collecting evidence, a possible misconception is that students might be "overwhelmed with text information". A strategy listed for this misconception and challenge is "ask scaffolding questions and provide highlighters". In a first grade science class, the teacher listed possible misconceptions regarding how complex eyes, such as those with multiple eyelids might work. The unit asks teachers to revisit the text and ask students to visualize and make connections to their own eyes as to eliminate any misunderstandings.
- A grade 2 science lesson listed the following supports as possible suggestions for English Language Learners and students with an Individualized Educational Plan: "discussion starter prompts"; "word wall and academic words usage"; "provide guided questions task cards on table"; "preferential seating". Similarly, a social studies lesson listed "sentences starters", "previewed vocabulary", "picture supports", and the use of iPads to ensure student access to the activity.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies include scaffolds and consistently provide entry points so that all students are appropriately challenged and demonstrate higher order thinking. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

Students are provided with a continuum of supports to ensure that they are appropriately challenged and can engage each other in high level classroom discussion using academic vocabulary and text based evidence and mathematical reasoning to justify their answers; however, student ownership was not observed across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- All lessons observed had need-based student groups with appropriate supports. In one math class visited, students were in one of 3 tiers when developing mental strategies for decomposing numbers in order to simplify facts. Tier I was comprised of students struggling with finding the difference on the number line, and Tier III students could work independently with an extension question. Students were observed working on different math problems with varying degrees of supports. In a class on Native American traditions, students who needed more supports were given the time to read the text multiple times and focus on concrete questions such as “What did you learn?” How can you use the index to help you locate facts?” and had the time to act it out and use sentence starters for writing, while students who had a deeper understanding, worked on independent research.
- Students used text-based evidence to defend their answers, question other students or justify their mathematical reasoning. In a grade 2 Integrated Co-Teaching class, students were engaged in sorting and categorizing the eyes of various animals such as snakes and lizards. The learning target was, “Why do tiny animals have the most complex eyes?” Students used a graphic organizer to sort different types of eyes and engaged in a student-to-student conversation using text evidence to defend how they had sorted them. When the teacher asked why small animals have complex eyes one student said, “It’s important to have complex eyes for survival.” When asked why, another student elaborated by holding the book up and saying, “There are predators, like eagles, waiting to eat the small animals.” When the teacher asked about predators’ eyes another child said, “Predators, like eagles, don’t have to worry about survival because they are not on the ground and in danger.” Survival and predator were among the unit’s vocabulary posted on the board.
- In a grade 3 math class, students unpacked a word problem comparing the weight of apples and peaches. Students sat with the teacher and looked for a keyword to set up a math problem based on the question, “How much more did the apples weigh than the peaches?” Students grappled with the idea that the question included the keyword “more”, yet this was not an addition problem. The students isolated the problem’s components and began to notice that they were involved in a problem calling for understanding “difference”. One student used a number line as a tool to help understand the problem, he said, “I think that this requires subtraction.” Another student asked him to defend his answer, the student said, “The numbers are getting lower.” The other replied, “So is the pattern that the numbers are increasing or decreasing in this problem?” However, student ownership of learning is not evident across classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across grades and subjects. Classrooms reflect consistent and ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Assessment data is collected daily in all classrooms and used for grouping students and adjusting lessons. School data is basis of conversations at teacher team levels and when meeting with school leaders to adjust instruction and curricula.

Supporting Evidence

- Beginning, middle and end-of-year school-wide assessments are administered across grades. The school also administers: English Language Arts (ELA) and math interim assessments organized by standards as checkpoints to ensure that students are on track; running records 4 times per year; Math Exemplars pre- and post- assessments organized by problem solving, reasoning and proof, communications, connections and representation. Additionally, school leaders instituted “Trimester Folder Conversations” with teachers as a method of monitoring classroom and grade level progress in the identified standards.
- All teachers were given a Chrome Notebook with all data trackers and data sheets pre-loaded. In all classrooms, teachers were observed conferencing with students and entering data into their computer or on paper sheet on their clipboard. In one math class, a grade 2 teacher was conferencing with students and recording students’ ability to “Find sums of three addends by applying the commutative and associative properties of addition.” Her lesson plan demonstrated prepared activities ready for students to engage in as a result of this check for understanding. In a grade 1 class, a teacher had a notebook and was listening to student discussion and making notations of E for emerging, D for developing and M for mastered under speaking and listening standard 1.SL.1b (build on others talk in conversation by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges).
- Teachers use various forms of checks for understanding in addition to rubrics such as thumbs up, checklists, “I can statements”, check-ins, and exits slips. In a social studies class focusing on Native American harvest celebrations, students used a section on “quality details” from the informational writing rubric as a guide when collecting details for an essay. In a math class, an interactive whiteboard slide read, “It’s time to self-assess. Choose the statement that best describes you. Then get into your group.” The slide depicted a table with 4 columns. Column 1 said, “If all your quick checks are correct, go to the run and work on enrichment packet pages 3-8. If you missed one quick check, work on your Math Journal on how multiplication is like addition and how it is different. If you missed two of the quick checks work in a team (Table 4) pg. 147-148. If you missed all of the quick checks (Table 5) Teacher Time.” Students assessed themselves using the check sheet provided by the teacher and went to their stations and worked on the skills they needed.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students and offer ongoing feedback and guidance supports.

Impact

A system of accountability is in place for all staff and prepares students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- A review, based upon the Danielson *Framework*, to teachers reflects the school's expectation of differentiation to meet student needs. For example, one observation included, "Increase teacher scaffolding incorporating manipulatives into your lessons (3c). We agreed your lesson plan would include various scaffolds to support student mastery of lessons."
- Both staff and students are held accountable to the school goal of using academic vocabulary during lessons and incorporating the use of student discourse to engage students in higher order thinking requiring multiple representations with proof and text-based conversations requiring evidence and a rationale for a position taken.
- In a meeting with students, all students readily shared a snapshot of their goal, their strength and their challenges. In particular, a 5th grade student stated, "I need to get better at double digit multiplication with regrouping, for example, 15x27. That is my next step." Another student stated that his goal was to internalize more "...mental math strategies that I can share with my partner during math discussions and work justifications in mathematical dialogue."
- When students were asked about preparation for their next academic level, a student shared her 5th grade portfolio which contained anchor student pieces of work across subjects with teacher feedback and student reflection. She shared that this was the portfolio that all students created in their senior year and brought with them to middle school interviews to discuss. A grade 4 student added that 4th grade was the most important grade to middle school recruiters and that he felt that the teachers had prepared him to "unlock the secrets to success in middle school and beyond through hard work." In particular, he credited the school focus on thinking and discussion skills.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promoted implementation of the CCLS. Distributive leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership and teachers play an integral role in key decisions.

Impact

Teacher teamwork results in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Teacher teams partner with school leaders to make key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During the team meeting, teachers examined student essays and put these into groups of students who had successfully integrated evidence, students who integrated it with some success and those that had difficulty. Teachers noticed that while students understood that they needed to include cite-based evidence in their writing, the evidence they provided had just been dropped into place and was not synthesized or referenced in the essay. Teachers identified this practice of incorporating the evidence in the essay as one that distinguishes a level 4 student from a level 3. Teachers decided that they would purposely teach this practice to level 3 students and begin to introduce this idea to level 2 students. One teacher suggested a T chart with “The text says...” on one side of the T chart and on the other side the phrase “This reminds me of...” as a way of having students unpack the evidence and incorporate it coherently into the writing. They all agreed to try this strategy for one week and return to the next meeting with student work samples using this strategy. Teachers agreed that the findings from the student work samples would be used to write an arc of lessons for their next unit to strengthen student writing which is a school-wide focus.
- Teachers spoke about increasing the sophistication of the writing. One of the concerns was that the Common Core asks students to include transition words like first, second and next. Teachers stated that students used these words fluently now; however, transition words are not limited to sequence and teachers wanted students to use a variety of words that would keep the writing flowing without being so formulaic. They traced the trend to grade 2 and decided that they would ask a member from the vertical team to come and sit with them to analyze grade 4 writing and see how they could help improve writing in the upper grades. One teacher stated, “As I learn what a student needs to know to master something, I know this team helps me learn a new strategy that I can use to reach my students.”
- The teacher teams shared that when the Department of Education launched the Common Core-aligned curriculum, they tried it for a few months and realized through analysis of student work, that there were many limitations to the curriculum. This led the teacher teams to investigate other curriculum. They piloted different curricula in various classes, shared out the data and recommended the current, supplemental curriculum. They also select and attend off-site professional development to turnkey to colleagues. They stated that in many respects, teacher teams are the steering wheel for change in the school.