Quality Review Report

2015-2016

J. H. S. 167 Robert F. Wagner

Middle School M167

220 East 76th Street
Manhattan
NY 10021

Principal: Jennifer Rehn

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Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman

The School Context

J. H. S. 167 Robert F. Wagner is a middle school with 1,356 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 28% Asian, 8% Black, 19% Hispanic, and 42% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 18% 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 95.7%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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 *Framework for Teaching*, 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		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Well Developed**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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
Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are consistently embedded in all curricula and tasks. Teachers regularly plan and revise curricula based on student work and data.

Impact
Given the consistent attention to rigorous habits and providing opportunities for all students to cognitively engage in challenging tasks, all students, across grades and subjects, demonstrate their thinking, and have access to content.

Supporting Evidence

- The emphasis on writing across the content areas is embedded in all curricula. This was born from data that revealed that although students mastered citing evidence, they still required work to structure written arguments. This is addressed in weekly vertical planning meetings where teachers share they make ongoing adjustments to curricula to focus on analysis and reasoning, to tweak language in rubrics for greater student access, and to address math problem solving. In one math unit reviewed, notes were taken directly on the document for the next time it is taught indicating the need to "spiral back to Unit 4, solving real-world problems algebraically."

- When common pre-assessments revealed that students were struggling with multi-stepped problems or recognizing the "invisible problem within the problem," math teachers adjusted the curricula by redesigning their problem-solving template to move students away from mnemonic formulas in expressing their mathematical thinking. The idea was not to "fill out a template, but to explicitly teach the habits of mind that make students better problem solvers" with an awareness of their process and skill level. Additionally, evidence of ongoing revisions to curricula across grades and content areas were in ample evidence in all documents reviewed. For example, the seventh grade social studies team aligned their curriculum to the new social studies framework, and moved the Reconstruction unit to the seventh grade to provide time for greater exploration of the eighth grade content.

- Special education teachers embed students' Individualized Educational Plan" (IEP) goals into unit plans so that teachers can adjust small group tasks to meet the needs of their students. Teachers then break down the goals into manageable objectives based on test growth in ELA and math. Thus, students can demonstrate thinking and access challenging tasks. An English as a New Language teacher planned her lesson to break down academic language so that students could be cognitively engaged and respond to the unit's essential questions.

- In a seventh grade social studies lesson, the task required students to prepare for a debate to determine whether colonies should pay for the French and Indian wars. They were assigned a perspective, the Patriots or the Loyalists. This would also require them to set discussion goals such as finding evidence from the text to help support a claim. This included time to share first with a partner, and then with the whole class, and to write a closing argument addressed to someone opposing the student's point of view.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms strategies to provide all student learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, with multiple entry points into content and work products were in evidence.

Impact
However, students were not consistently challenged to engage in making meaning collaboratively to reflect their higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- In a seventh grade history class, students were in their second day of studying a variety of excerpts from the Declaration of Independence to determine if the American Revolution accomplished its goals. Students worked at stations to capture the gist of an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence, and discuss what they understood with their group. One student shared that "we work together and write answers we agree on." The lesson plan indicated that students were heterogeneously grouped, and a teacher supported a small group of students achieving in the lowest third. Supports such as leveled texts, dictionaries, checklists, and tiered graphic organizers with sentence starters for written responses, were available for targeted students. An extension activity to "explain to Thomas Jefferson that "all men are created equal" is a contradiction" was on hand for those who completed the station work. Such supports were in evidence across classrooms engaging students in their learning.

- To prepare for a circle discussion to defend or refute the justification for prosecuting child soldiers, students conducted prior research. The teacher, based on previous discussion notes, provided sentence stems and a discussion template to reluctant student speakers to provide time to construct responses prior to participating. Red and green cards tallied who spoke, and indicated when one of the students in this small group wanted to share out. Transcripts of student-led discussions were available to students who required more time to process new learning. Views varied from a concern that if the children are not prosecuted, the "cycle of violence will continue," to noting "their minds were not fully developed when they were forcibly recruited."

- In a sixth grade math class, the teacher floated among groups pushing students' thinking: "Can you compare your answers? Are they the same?" If a student asked if his or her answer were correct, the teacher asked, "What do you think?" Two students discussed their different approaches, and when stuck, brought in a third student to reach consensus. However, in another math class, although the teacher pushed students to offer different approaches for determining the cost of a sale item with 25% off, and provided opportunity for students to turn-and-talk, students did not grapple with potential solutions collaboratively. In most classrooms, students worked independently with multi-tiered graphic organizers and writing prompt handouts. In an eighth grade science class, students engaged in a hands-on experiment to learn about the earth's tilt and revolutions around the sun. However, there were missed opportunities for students to authentically engage in productive struggle or to create a product that required all to participate equally.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
Teachers consistently administer common assessments, track student outcomes, and adjust their curricula to create a clear picture of student progress. Teachers frequently check for student understanding, and provide opportunities for students to self-assess progress.

Impact
Given the ongoing adjustments teachers make to their instruction, all students are aware of their next learning steps and demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers use a variety of tools for tracking student performance. In a seventh grade data meeting, teachers analyzed color-coded performance data to identify students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, by achievement level. After identifying trends such as inconsistent trait levels between history and ELA, and inconsistencies in rubric scores, the team agreed to reevaluate the assessment to make certain it will "prepare students for high school," reteach paragraphs using exemplars, and create small groups for students with the lowest scores. After analysis of science assessment data, teachers noticed that students either skipped or answered incorrectly questions with unfamiliar scientific vocabulary. This led to previewing vocabulary prior to beginning a unit, and designing vocabulary activities and word walls to engage students in word study.

- The math team is using a new data-driven classroom tool to get accurate information about what skills or standards students mastered. To this end, they redesigned their multiple-choice questions to align to specific standards in order to strategically identify misconceptions. A math teacher also shared that she created "progress checks in all my units" aligned to unit goals. In sixth grade this resulted in a focus on rational numbers and operations, and student performance improved. Additionally, across classrooms students consistently use a variety of checklists to reflect on their work and next steps.

- The ELA team determined next steps after Fountas and Pinnell assessment results revealed that students were not moving to higher reading levels quickly enough. The team advocated for three independent reading periods a week so that students have greater opportunity to read at their level and build fluency. The teachers designed differentiated thinking prompts and bookmarks to support student thinking as they read in order to prepare them for text-based discussions with peers and to reflect on their discussion habits.

- An eighth grade teacher shared that his team consistently norms rubric language and scoring, tracks exit slip data, and revises task language for greater accessibility for all students. This targeted use of data both informs instructional decisions, and creates a structure for all students to monitor their progress. This has resulted in a 28% increase in student performance in social studies. A science teacher shared that for his students who are in the process of investigating simple machines, he uses exit slip data to "tag students who do not get it" and then works one-on-one with them to clarify the steps needed "to get to the next level." This also helps him to adjust his instruction to meet all students' needs. Additionally, during the student meeting, students readily shared next steps for improving their writing, "explain your claims," and "hook the reader."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate a set of high expectations grounded in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to the entire staff. Families receive ongoing communication articulating the path to college and career readiness for their children.

Impact
Professional learning opportunities lead to all teachers holding themselves accountable for meeting expectations. Given teacher's commitment to students, families fully understand their children's progress.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers set data-based goals for themselves based on student performance. Teachers meet with school leaders in "formal data conversations" where student progress is the impetus for making informed adjustments to practice. The principal shared that teachers are held accountable to "this community" and that this is "made clear in the hiring process." In order to meet expectations, the principal provides structures for ongoing professional learning. All teacher teams and study groups submit "Professional Learning Plans" that identify a need, the data that informed it, their expected outcome, and a timeline for completion. ELA and humanities teachers track how increased independent reading time for their students impacts reading fluency. A second study group is focused on reading and writing practices for students with special needs. Quality Review findings, observation trends, and student performance informed this choice. The goal is to "develop content-based instructional pathways and modified assessments" aligned to the standards and IEP goals. The principal credits this focused work for increased scores in ELA, math, and science, for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

- All teacher teams share meeting minutes, resources, and next steps on Google Docs and engage in ongoing visits to each other's classrooms to hold themselves accountable for student engagement and progress and for feedback to their colleagues. All teachers complete and submit a template for the visits that include low inference notes on teacher and student actions and targeted questions to engage in further discussion such as" "how do we assess the content of turn-and-talks" or "How are students partnered?" Additionally, school leaders provide pre-and post-visit questions to deepen feedback discussions.

- Families attend content-based events to learn about instruction so they are able to support their children at home. Additionally, the school offers grade-level high school college nights and a workshop series for parents of students with special needs. Parents shared that teachers are always available and offer many opportunities for making expectations clear, "My daughter comes home with projects with rubrics. She knows exactly what she needs to do to score a four." Another parent shared that her daughter "really struggles," but teachers "help her to set goals each week". A parent noted with pride that her son is learning how to time manage "big projects in multiple subjects". Parents are informed of their children's progress via ongoing reports, on the online grading platform, and during weekly opportunities to meet with teacher teams, or with the principal in "coffee chats" to action plan support for their children at home. "We know," a parent stated, "how to challenge our children because the school takes the time to show us."

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

Findings
All teachers engage in professional collaborations that strengthen their practice and promote the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers analyze key elements of their practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share.

Impact
The work of teacher teams has created school-wide instructional coherence, improvements in teacher practice, and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- After a survey was conducted to surface areas in which teachers wanted to improve, pedagogical study groups were formed that are facilitated by teachers. One study group is focused on co-teaching models. The group visits each other's classrooms, and one teacher offered that this has given her the tools to experiment with different co-teaching models, and to get targeted feedback. The work in another study group is focused on vertical alignment, so that what is taught in the sixth grade "feeds into" the seventh. This supports the work done in the team meeting where teachers analyzed data and learned that students are "struggling with open-ended questions" and what a problem is really asking for. This resulted in work to create a tiered problem-solving template. One teacher shared that the work in this weekly study group is "opening our eyes to what students do not understand," for example, rephrasing a question for better understanding.

- Common planning time, embedded into the school day, provides opportunities for teachers to address and develop action plans for improving academic performance for individual and groups of students. For example, in a December meeting teachers reviewed math and reading assessment data for a student with disabilities. Teachers noted areas of strength, including organization, annotation, and decimal knowledge, and areas of concern, such as precision, vocabulary, and planning long-term assignments. Teachers set up interventions to support the student: an "accountability partner," thinking prompts to help "develop metacognition," and concept maps.

- The seventh grade team focused on writing structures because of findings in student writing. They grouped students based on strengths and weaknesses, then split into two groups to plan next steps. This resulted in the design of a set of leveled station activities whereby students at a basic level worked on "unscrambling" and color coding paragraphs, the mid-level groups worked on finding evidence, the mid-high level students evaluated paragraphs for the level of analysis, and the high performing students targeted writer's craft and word choice.

- In a team meeting, teachers shared how their collaboration has created more "specialized" and coherent instructional practices across classrooms. All teachers focus on reading and writing across subjects. One teacher shared, "I feel like more of a language arts teacher than a science teacher." He shared that "we are giving students the supports to access non-fiction science texts at their current reading level and beyond." He meets with ELA teachers to get feedback on his lesson plans. A math teacher remembered when there was no reading and writing in his curricula, and now sees the value in what students understand because he reads it in their reflective writing.