



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 234 Independence School

Elementary School M234

**292 Greenwich Street
Manhattan
NY 10007**

Principal: Lisa Ripperger

**Date of review: February 9, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

P.S. 234 Independence School is an elementary school with 703 students from grade kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 11% Asian, 1% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 70% White students. The student body includes 1% English Language Learners and 15% 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 96.1%.

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	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Focus	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	Well Developed
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:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices provide multiple entry points and high quality supports into curricula for all learners. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking by all learners.

Impact

All students are deeply engaged in appropriately challenging tasks that demonstrate higher-order thinking, participation, and ownership of their work.

Supporting Evidence

- Fourth graders engaged with each other in small groups to annotate the short story *Eleven* and indicate narrative elements and details that help to identify thesis. Students divided up the work so that each was responsible for one element, and when asked how they determine this, a student pointed to a chart that listed narrative text elements and the types of evidence one might find. Students surmised that the thesis connected to the character's age and that, as one student noted, "Your age doesn't always connect with your actions or abilities." The principal pointed out that students were grouped based on a prior assessment.
- In a second grade science class, students worked collaboratively to construct a tower that would be tested for its endurance once completed. Prompt questions were placed at each table: Are there any problems with your design? What engineering solutions will ensure your tower is stable? A criterion was posted for what the design must include and the limit on materials for the work. The teacher checked in with groups to push students' decisions, and collected notes on the various ways students approached the task: used alternative solutions from those learned, used string or columns to support, and built structure as a tent to affirm the originality and flexibility in their choices. Students were fully engaged in the work and knew exactly what to do, there were no procedural inquiries. At no time did the teacher offer answers, instead she referred back to the questions on the table. Students sketched their idea and labeled the forces that could impact their tower, and after completing the tower challenge, reflected on their process for ensuring the tower's stability. Students were strategically grouped based on learning style support or to provide a strong partner to help with a peer focus. All students were actively engaged in the hands-on task, and when asked why they were learning this, one student shared that they were learning about stability and force.
- Third grade students worked at math stations based on targeted skills they needed practice in. Teacher-led stations focused on arrays: visually representing multiplication, and strings: using known multiplication combinations to solve harder problems. Independent stations engaged students in writing and solving their own multiplication and division problems. Additionally, at these stations, students could color code their story problems as an added support, and a double challenge, to explain to a younger student how to discern whether a word problem requires multiplication or division was an extension for high performing students, or any student up to the challenge.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school consistently uses common assessment to track student progress toward goals across grades and subjects. Teachers' assessment practices reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and students engage in self-reflection.

Impact

Teachers consistently make instructional and curricula adjustments to meet their students' learning needs. However, across classrooms, there was uneven evidence that students' had an in-depth awareness of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's extensive work to create assessment guides aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the school's newly revised report card outline the content and skills for achieving mastery. For example, a second grade geometry guide emphasizes identifying fractions as equal parts of a whole or set, and a set of behaviors for meeting standards such as combines fractions (like and unlike) to make one whole. The guide included strategies such as using objects to separate fractional parts, questions for assessing students' understanding, and next steps for students who meet or exceed goals. The literacy guide emphasizes listening to and taking notes as students read and write responses to complex texts to detect comprehension. This has resulted in adjustments to improve independent and guided reading groups.
- Teachers shared that they provide oral feedback to students connected to learning goals during conferences. They also maintain anecdotal notes to monitor student work in reading groups, and provide students with exemplars and mentor texts to support self-assessment. Upon completion of written tasks, students set goals for the next piece. A math teacher added that she prepares students for middle school by requiring them to find their own mistakes and correct them. Additionally, students have multiple opportunities to reflect on their learning, and, as one teacher noted, students return to the same reflection a month later so she can measure growth.
- Students are empowered to provide each other with feedback on peer's work and this was in evidence on bulletin boards and student work products. This was affirmed by students who shared that "we get a lot of feedback from each other." Several also offered examples of the feedback they received from "use capital letters" and "fix what I did wrong", to "expand on your writing" and "work on character traits." Students reflect on their learning in reading and writing notebooks and set goals such as "I need to make my work more clear" and "I have to remember to label my answer." Although teachers offer targeted feedback in conferences, students did not articulate meaningful next steps that would move their work to the next level.
- One teacher used a graphic organizer to support a student writer. However, after closely monitoring the students' thinking process, she realized the student articulated her ideas, but could not transfer them to her writing. She made a quick adjustment and let the student use a voice note on her phone.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks are refined using student work and data.

Impact

Students benefit from thoughtful Common Core Learning Standards aligned curricula driving coherent instruction, college and career readiness, and cognitive engagement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that in looking at the curricula in place and the Common Core Learning Standards the staff realized that they needed to focus on multiplication and division of fractions in the fifth grade. This, she noted, is a “new expectation that students leave with a sense of whole numbers.” This resulted in revisions to the curricula adjusted at the grade level with support from a math coach, and pushed teachers to build their content knowledge in those areas.
- In a task to prepare students for written response, fifth grade students viewed a video of Susan B. Anthony and read an informational text, *Susan B. Anthony Dares to Vote*. This was intended to inform student-to-student discussion to debate her act of civil disobedience, the fairness of her trial and why the judge did not order Anthony to serve her sentence. A student offered that Anthony had little opportunity to defend herself because she was pitted against men, and another added that “If the judge had ordered her to go to jail, it would take away the chance to give it to the Supreme Court.” Additionally, an extension activity to analyze a political cartoon *The Woman Who Dared* was available for students who completed the initial assignment.
- Across multiple classrooms, station activities provided access to challenging tasks for a diverse range of students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. Stations are leveled based on student need; some stations are teacher led, while in others students work independently or on collaborative tasks. For example, a literary non-fiction unit included two teacher-directed stations regarding writer’s craft in either using graphics to reveal important information or how writers isolate, define, and call attention to content words important to the topic. Differentiated structures include choice in topic, visual supports, and individualized modifications such as headphones or verbal instructions. In the independent stations for reading, students read self-selected informational texts and identified big ideas and how the writer supports them. In writing, students compose a nonfiction text on a self-selected topic to demonstrate what they learned about craft and voice.
- Teachers regularly take notes on their units throughout implementation. In a first grade reading unit, the teacher tracked students’ text preferences to consider new selections for read alouds and mentor texts in future units. In a second grade unit, the teacher noted that students needed grounding in writer’s message. Similarly, in a fourth grade unit, the teacher revised the unit to expose students to figurative language and imagery. Math teachers posed questions to guide revisions such as “Can content be rooted in a meaningful context?” Upon reflection, they agreed to provide more time for students to practice two-digit addition and subtraction, and to explicitly model a range of strategies.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training for meeting them, and communicate these academic expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness to students and families.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability amongst all staff, and families as partners in their children's academic success.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has revised its report card to align to the Common Core Learning Standards and include specific indicators connected to each standard across all content areas. This provides families with information on how their child is quantitatively performing in classes, and includes teachers' narratives on student performance. Students are not only assessed based on content knowledge but on stamina, effort, and independent performance. Students are either far below, approaching, meeting or exceeding standards. Parents felt that this report card is unique and appreciate that the principal took the time to fully explain it. As one parent stated, "Now we deeply understand what the expectations are."
- The principal noted that teachers encouraging students to work independently is reflected in the celebrations of student work. She encourages risk taking and has seen ongoing professional growth in teachers. Her expectation is that teachers maintain a learning stance, be open to feedback, and recognize that she does not expect perfection. Teachers are expected to set their own goals, and support each other as they grow their practice.
- The school's communication committee works alongside school leaders to prioritize communication amongst school constituents. This has resulted in a comprehensive staff handbook, ongoing math mornings, parental participation in classrooms, and, at the parents' suggestion, providing all students with academic planners. The principal credits the committee's efforts with breaking down communication barriers and increasing parents' attendance at curricula celebrations.
- All families interviewed felt the school holds their children to high expectations and are impressed with the depth of understanding their students hold. One parent was impressed with how well her first grader understood the inner workings of a restaurant, another shared that he has never seen his son so excited about the American Revolution. One parent noted that teachers encourage students to advocate for themselves. When her daughter was not participating in class, she was encouraged to meet with the teacher to discuss it, and they came to an understanding. Families also felt welcomed and encouraged to participate in many school events to support the school, its teachers, and their children. A third parent noted that the written assignments her child brings home were "not writing just for writing's sake. It is writing with a purpose, and reflective of what a historical figure [experiences]. They contextualize it." Communication to families is ongoing throughout the year and is always in service of children's academic progress. Expectations are set at the start of the year with a survey to learn about each student, and a curricula presentation. The principal joins family meetings monthly, and teachers are in weekly contact with parents to update them on their children's progress.

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 professional collaborations that strengthen teachers' instructional capacity and promote the Common Core Learning Standards. Teams systematically analyze their practices, alongside the assessment data and work products for students they share.

Impact

The ongoing work of teacher teams results in instructional coherence, increased student achievement, and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The social studies department engaged in a discussion of essay writing. They reviewed current event topics, and considered what students might be asked to do: consider the norm, why it is a problem, and offer solutions for addressing it. They agreed to provide opportunities for students to conduct research and interviews so that they will come away with a deeper understanding of the issues, and become articulate in the information they learn. As a result, they narrowed the focus to civil rights and suffrage, but agreed to provide students the choice in topic. This led to crafting a rubric that defined expectations for mastery.
- In a kindergarten meeting, teachers reflected on the four lenses for assessment: looking closely at writing, listening as children are engaged in the process, asking children to articulate their process, and looking at the work of a child over time. The goal was to build student independence and fluency in literacy. Across classrooms, this focused attention to independent thinking, reading and writing was in abundant evidence.
- In the team meeting attended, teachers discussed recent assessment data with several questions in mind. How does the assessment give us the information we are looking for? What does this reveal about a student? What comes next for the reader? Teachers discussed their students' reactions to the assessment and how there was less panic. Students, they noted, appeared more willing to take a risk, and made connections between setting and character. The team recorded their learning on a common chart used to note what a grade team's assessment reveals in order to determine next steps for each student. In this case, the team revised their current assessment, and noted a positive trend as a result of their focused work in independent reading; students were recording more open-ended questions in their notebooks.
- Teams study their assessments for what they can learn to support their students' learning and improve their practice. The second grade team identified students' academic behaviors aligned to the math standard, by asking them to explain and represent thinking using words, notations and models. If students were approaching standards, for example, explanations would be unclear or incomplete. If they were exceeding standards, student answers would understand the association between when to use specific strategies and which would be most effective. The math team then identified next steps for each student in the targeted group.