



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Spruce Street School

Elementary - Middle School M397

**12 Spruce Street
Manhattan
New York 10038**

Principal: Nancy Harris

**Date of Review: December 8, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

Spruce Street School is an elementary – middle school with 442 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 6. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 14% Asian, 3% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 58% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 14% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.6%.

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	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

All teachers administer or create assessments and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula that highlight student mastery. The use of common assessments consistently tracks all students' progress toward goals, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Impact

All students and teachers receive actionable and meaningful feedback connected to student achievement. Teachers consistently adjust instruction so that all students achieve mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- All rubrics and assessment data are stored using a data tracking system that gives teachers quick access to student progress across grades. The principal shared that this immediate access to data enables teachers to adjust instruction and create strategic groupings. For example, math teachers use this data to create guided math groups by skill area. Additionally, the vast majority of teachers keep student conference notes that pinpoint where students are. Sample notations included "needs help dividing decimals," "number pattern explanation unclear" and "needs mathematical explanation." Additionally, students set individual goals in each content area and reflect on them during conferences with teachers.
- Teachers adjusted their writing rubrics to reflect the new focus on three forms of writing in English and social studies: narrative, informational, and opinion. This has created more room for adjustments to practice, and for providing rubric-based feedback with next steps for all students. In the student meeting, students readily shared how rubrics and their teachers' feedback pushed them to understand their next steps. A fourth grade student was advised to write a stronger introduction to hook her reader in, and learned the importance of connecting selected text evidence to thesis statements. The writing piece took her three weeks during which she received ongoing feedback and support in class and on her drafts. She said that this helped her to earn five fours on the task rubric. Another shared that he received feedback, but "couldn't figure out how to fix it. My teacher asked me questions to help me and doesn't give us the answer. She just paves the path so we understand for ourselves."
- When teachers compared the *Fountas and Pinnell* reading level data to the English Language Arts (ELA) exam, they realized that despite students meeting or exceeding reading benchmarks, this was not reflected in the ELA exam scores. They wondered if students were progressing too quickly through reading levels without a deeper understanding of what they were reading. This instigated a push to pilot a new reading assessment in the third grade, to balance close reading and text discussions with balanced literacy in the fourth and fifth grades, and to look at close reading and writing across the school. Teachers' consistent practice of maintaining conferring notes and running records captures and communicates progress to students and teachers, and informs ongoing student group adjustments such as literacy centers in the lower grades.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula that are reflected in high levels of student participation and work products.

Impact

While students engage in appropriately challenging tasks that provide opportunities for higher order thinking, this is not yet evident in the vast majority of classes.

Supporting Evidence

- The school is in the process of growing from its current grades PK-6 to a PK-8, but does not yet have grades 7 to 8. In a first grade classroom, students were preparing for the new unit on bread by first offering what they knew and posing questions about the topic: “Do they all have crusts?”, “Where do factories get the bread?” and “Is it healthy?” The teacher instructed students to view the chart and consider what else they wanted to learn. Most were curious and jotted down interests, but in some cases, students reiterated questions they had already generated. This was a first step into the research.
- In a fourth grade classroom, the teacher modeled how to analyze a poem line by line. To push students’ thinking the teacher asked not only for students to summarize and determine what the lines meant, but to infer the poet’s tone or bias. She created a visual continuum so that students could gauge responses from positive to negative. Later in the lesson, students had an opportunity to discuss with a partner, and engaged in an extension activity to compare and contrast the poem to one studied the day before.
- The Table Top math program starts the day in classrooms across grades. Students work in stations based on the fluency skill they need to master. In a fourth grade math class, students were paired to work on multiplication, the division strategy of partial quotient, or understanding multiples and factors. The teacher also worked with a small group of students on solving division problems. The principal shared the importance of engaging students in this work to build their math fluency, and to teach students how to unpack multi-stepped word problems. This program is structured with concepts taught over several days.
- In a second grade reading workshop, the teacher modeled how to discern a character trait by listening to what the character says, “I think he is moody, but I have to prove it.” Students discussed what they thought they could prove based on textual evidence and then they were paired to continue the work. During work time, the teacher supported a small group of students, and all students had access to a bank of sample words from which to pull ideas. In a sixth grade class, students engaged in a close reading of the text, “Foragers” and were provided with a set of annotating prompts such as: write a summary, circle key words, or make an inference.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that all curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and purposefully integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are embedded in a coherent way in all tasks.

Impact

Curricula and tasks across all grades and content areas prepare all students for their college and career readiness. The emphasis on higher order skills and habits are embedded in tasks to provide all students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus is on building research through project-based learning and literacy across disciplines. For example, one project requires students to conduct an investigation into vending machines to learn about the functions of two division types, partitive and quotative. Students were to engage in a range of strategies from skip counting and multiplying up, to proportional reasoning and noting partial quotients. In the fifth grade unit, "From Here to There: The Immigrant Experience," students complete an oral history project which involves an interview with a first generation immigrant. Throughout the process, students create timelines of their journeys, prepare interview questions, and compare and contrast their journeys from arrival to settlement emulating what researchers do. Throughout the process, students enter new learning into an interactive research notebook.
- The principal shared the progression of the school's work to embed research skills into all curricula. Last year, for example, the kindergarten research unit focused on "my family." This year it has been broadened to include all families, and a unit on life cycles was added. Fifth grade students research the civil rights movement and connect it to current issues.
- The school has made a shift so that students have multiple opportunities to experience three forms of writing: narrative, informational, and opinion. Teachers revised the writing rubric, and the principal now requires two writing pieces per standard across grades. This includes social studies where this focus had not been before. Fourth graders produced research papers on the Iroquois. They were provided with mentor texts to exemplify the research writing structure, and learned effective note-taking strategies and how to embed quotes from a variety of informational texts into their essays. Additionally, student work is taken through the stages of the writing process from planning and gathering evidence, to drafting, revision and publishing. Finished products line the hallways.
- In pre-kindergarten through second grade, students focus on understanding varying perspectives. The focus is on awareness of community, and, thereby, the units emphasize cultural difference. In grades three through six, teachers implement literacy and research units tied to countries, cultures, and civilizations. Spruce Street School's College and Career Readiness document outlines how content knowledge, valuing evidence, and the use of digital media readies students for middle school grades.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The principal consistently holds all teachers to high expectations and puts structures in place to ensure that they meet them. The principal and teachers communicate high expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

Teachers hold themselves accountable for meeting the high expectations set forth by the school leaders. The school leaders and all teachers successfully partner with families to support students' progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- At the start of the year, teachers host curricula night, during which they present the yearlong curricula and clarify the Common Core Learning Standard expectations. Parents receive ongoing communication regarding their child's progress. One parent shared that "problems are caught quickly" and that conferences with teachers are "one-on-one" and "qualitative." Additionally, parents shared that teachers communicate expectations via weekly emails and backpack notes so that should an issue arise, parents are fully informed. For example, a parent noted that her child's teacher provided a "heads up" that her daughter was struggling in math. The teacher partnered with the parent to provide a tutorial and a packet for how to support her daughter at home, and "now she is on task." Designated parents are also a part of the communication pipeline and inform other parents about current information should they miss a meeting.
- The principal held a meeting to unpack the grading system. Several parents offered that they did not know what a level 2 looked like but once clarified, it was understood. Having the rubrics also "outlines it for us." Several parents said they appreciated the opportunity to learn alongside their children four times a year at the end of each unit. One parent offered, "This gives us a hands-on experience with our students." Another parent noted that the school provides the strategies for approaching their children's work so that they can "hear the logic behind teaching." This is very different, several agreed, from how they learned.
- The principal expects all teachers to design units of study that reflect a deep research study connected to an essential question. She expects all teachers to regularly adjust unit and lesson plans to increase student independence. To this end, the principal provides additional common planning periods for teachers to plan and design curricula, analyze assessment data, and look at student work so that they are supported in meeting her expectations. Teachers share that they receive consistent and actionable feedback aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the principal shared that they are held accountable for improved practices.

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

All teachers are engaged in inquiry-based collaborations that align to the school's goals and the instructional shifts. Teachers assume leadership roles to build their instructional capacity.

Impact

Professional collaboration results in the consistent improvement in teachers' instructional capacity, and they have a voice in key instructional decisions regarding student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Classroom lab sites and teacher intervisitations provide time for collegial sharing of best practices. Scheduling is based on a teacher survey in which teachers identified what they wanted to learn to improve their practice, and what they could offer to colleagues. One teacher shared that it was important to see her students interacting in another classroom to help her adjust her practice. Each grade team will have a literacy and a math lab site, where they plan and teach a lesson collaboratively. This has been piloted in the fourth grade. The principal monitors teachers' feedback from visits, and notes that teachers regularly implement the practices they observed the next day.
- The school's grade teams voluntarily redesigned the school's text resources in order to align them to the school's instructional focus on research and independent reading and to match resources to student needs. Teachers divided the work stream into: research resources, guided reading, complex literary texts, and big books. Teachers planned and organized a retreat so that they could map out the advisory curricula with a focus on student-led conferences. Teachers also spearhead orientations and parent events. One teacher shared that she took on a coaching role to support her peers and to develop her leadership. Teachers also shared the impact that their work in teams has provided. For example, one stated, "I learned to be more explicit when working in a new collaborative team teaching partnership."
- The grade 4 team noticed that students were not making connections aligned to the rubric's criteria. They created a second exemplar to make sure the data was correct and tied the assessment to a high interest math project connected to vending machines. They returned to the rubric to norm what reflects a novice or an expert, and highlighted what they each understood as the indicators for proficiency. The teachers reasoned that if the rubric was more student-friendly, this would help and made a revision their next step. Additionally, they agreed to provide a model for students using an anchor chart. In the team meeting observed, teachers considered approaches to yield successful performances for their lowest and highest performing students, and determined that more consistent use of sentence starters and additional prompts would be the next step. This prompted a revision to the unit plan.