



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Robert E. Peary School

Elementary-Middle School Q075

**16-66 Hancock Street
Queens
NY 11385**

Principal: James Thorbs

**Date of review: November 12-13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Robin Cohen**

The School Context

Robert E. Peary School is an elementary-middle school with 545 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016 the school population comprises 15% Asian 24% Black, 45% Hispanic, and 11% White students. The student body includes 31% English language learners and 99% special education students. Boys account for 78% of the students enrolled and girls account for 22%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 88.4%.

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	Additional Findings	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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

All teachers participate in inquiry-based, content, and grade-band teams so that all teams have opportunities to collaborate on curriculum development, plan for instruction, strengthen teacher practice, and analyze student work. Embedded leadership structures ensure teachers have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact

Professional collaborations, cohesive curricula, and unified classroom practices continuously strengthen teacher practice ensuring a shared commitment to increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet daily and are grouped according to grade bands, academic content areas, and student populations. Teachers voted to use their extended school day on Mondays with the specific focus on communication skills and continued implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts. A meeting plan guide was developed for all teacher teams to utilize, ensuring consistency across the organization. Team members suggest collegial inter-visitations based on teachers' stated area of need to strengthen pedagogical practices and promote self-reflection.
- The creation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) teacher team ensures goals are cognitively appropriate, rigorous and challenging, encouraging higher order thinking skills. For example, a teacher stated her student has difficulty with responding to level 1 Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions and had difficulty responding to Students Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI) assessment. Team members suggested using an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device, which is IEP driven. This would determine if student had difficulty with expressive versus receptive language.
- Inquiry teams analyze student work, thereby focusing on the acceleration of student learning for the different populations that the school serves. Presently, students in standardized assessment use "Thinking Maps" as a specific scaffold to support English language arts (ELA) and math problem solving skills and writing. For classes using Thinking Maps, there is an overall growth based on New York State exams, of 63% in ELA, 55% in math, and 25% in writing skills. For classes not using Thinking Maps, there is a 19% growth in ELA, 22% in math, and 14% in writing.
- To actively facilitate distributed leadership, specific structures were designed and are embedded within the school's day-to-day operation. Lead teachers are chosen based upon a highly effective rating on the *Advance* Measure for Teacher Practice. During a teacher team meeting, teachers articulated how they are active members of the school community by serving as mentors, coaches, facilitator, and workshop presenters.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school uses common assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula to determine student progress. Teachers check for understanding and provide actionable feedback.

Impact

School leaders and teachers have an ongoing understanding of the progress of all learners which effectively informs instructional practices at the team and classroom level. However, meaningful feedback, including from student self-assessment and peer-to-peer assessment varies, thus limiting student awareness of their next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- In standardized assessment classes, students in grades 3-8 fall within the “at-risk” category according to the New York City (NYC) Performance Series in reading, math, and English Language Arts (ELA). Monitoring is conducted monthly by school leaders, the school-based coach, and the data team. Teachers stated they use the data to identify students’ areas of strength and weakness and incorporate the findings into instruction which provides additional individual support. Results from the 2015 New York State exams in ELA and math indicate 6.25% of students achieved level 2 in ELA and 10.20% in math.
- A review of teachers’ conference notes and classroom observations indicates that formative assessments lead to instructional adjustments such as regrouping of students, re-teaching of concepts, providing paraprofessionals with pre-planned questions, guided group practice, and independent practice. Adjustments observed included extended time in guided reading groups, audio-visual aids, and leveled texts including the use of Picture Exchange Symbols (PEC).
- In all classrooms visited, portfolios included monthly collection of work samples and assessment data (academic as well as social/behavior) that are maintained to provide evidence of student mastery of their IEP goals. In addition, the school revamped their Data Profile Sheets to reflect the students’ learning modalities, as well as their preferred mode of communication.
- Across classrooms, ongoing checks for understanding, as seen during class visits, included 1:1 conferencing with classroom teachers, exit slips, checklists and rubrics that meet the cognitive level of students. However, in some classes teacher feedback to students was vague and not specific. For example, during a middle school science class for students with autism, the feedback given to a student was “you need to write in complete sentences.” The student could not explain what this meant. The school is presently piloting and implementing a feedback form attached to students’ culminating task to ensure that students are aware of their next steps and to serve as an additional tracking tool for student progress. In addition, students in standardized assessment classrooms were given time to self-assess and complete a self-evaluation form; while in alternate assessment classrooms this practice varies. During the alternate assessment team meeting, teachers stated they “need to focus on strengthening student self-assessment and peer-to-peer assessment practices would allow students to reflect on their own work.”

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and tactically integrate the instructional shifts. The school continues to deepen, expand and refine their curriculum maps and units of study using student work and data, to ensure a range of learning experiences, cognitively appropriate and challenging, engaging all students in academics, social/emotional learning and life skills.

Impact

The school's curricula decisions have built coherence across all subject areas while promoting college and career readiness, thereby, fostering increased achievement for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school made purposeful choices about their curricula based on student performance and periodic assessments. In alternate assessment classes, the school utilizes Attainment Curriculum which is aligned to CCLS. SANDI scores indicated that the majority of students in grade band K-2, do not display the pre-requisite skills in reading, writing, math, and communication needed to progress through the SANDI Assessment. Therefore, for students more cognitively impaired and have limited communication skills the Assessment of Basic Language and Literacy Skills (ABLLS-R) is utilized and provides a curriculum guide and skills tracking system. This program is based on the science of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Skinner's theory of Verbal Behavior (VB) and covers 544 skills.
- Lesson plans include the integration of the instructional shifts across content area subjects. For example, during a K-2 class for students with cognitive disabilities, the focus of the math lesson was to build academic vocabulary of "more" or "less". The lesson included strategies such as word/picture walls, manipulatives, and math cue cards.
- All classes with students participating in standardized assessment utilize "Thinking Maps" in order to organize their thinking and provide a tool for more effective writing. During the student meeting, students were able to tell me which map "they liked best." The students stated "it depends upon what we are trying to do." "If I am trying to put things in order, I use the flow map." Another student stated "if I am describing something, I use the bubble map." During classroom visits, teachers stated there is ongoing training in Thinking Maps.
- Planning and refining is evident in the revised curricula maps organized by grade bands and academic content areas. In addition, the school's curriculum maps and units of study were developed for both the students in standardized and alternate assessment. Maps include lessons that are differentiated to meet the functional needs of all students. These maps provide evidence that the school develops rigorous tasks through the adaptation and modification of their instructional programs. A classroom inventory of core curriculum is kept on file to ensure teacher's access to Common Core materials and additional academic intervention services (AIS) supports. As seen during classroom visits, the school utilizes *Unique* (content area subject), *Smile* (phonics) *Reading A-Z* (leveled books), and *TouchMath* to customize student academic intervention curricula.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practices reflect the school’s articulated belief system that students learn best when engaged in lessons that are functional: pragmatic, hands-on and experiential, and when lessons are differentiated with multiple entry points.

Impact

Across classrooms, teaching practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and regularly support students to produce cognitively appropriate work products

Supporting Evidence

- Based upon *Advance* data, the school identified key components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, focusing on teacher improvement in designing coherent instruction (1E), using questioning and discussion techniques (3B), and engaging students in learning (3C). School leaders stated the daily “walkthrough” provides evidence of teachers utilizing strategies such as “turn-and-talk” and “my turn”. In a grade 1/2 class for students with autism, the teaching point during morning meeting was to provide opportunities to develop group participation skills such as return greetings and turn-taking. The Verbal Behavior model is used to build upon the language skills students have exhibited through the ABLLS-R assessment.
- Alternate assessment classrooms are designed to support teacher-guided, student-centered methodology. Classroom visits revealed common expectations in the classroom design such as: the flow of the day, teaching points, individual student schedules, 1:1 areas, small group work, whole class instruction, and related service providers’ schedules.
- Teachers’ lesson plans and classroom visits revealed the use of technology, Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, multi-sensory instruction that addresses the learning styles, True Object Based Icons (TOBI), and Picture Exchange Communication system (PECs). In an elementary class (grades 3-5) for students with autism, the teaching point was to demonstrate how plants and trees have basic needs by exploring seeds, soil, and water needed to make a plant grow. The lesson was differentiated to support the varied levels of the students. Students either located pictures of objects, sorted objects into categories, or independently planted seeds in a pot and began to “chart” progress of growth. In addition, the teacher reproduced the book “My How to Plant Vegetable Seeds” to meet the three levels needs of the students.
- Teaching practices are closely aligned to the CCLS emphasizing students’ functional and instructional levels. In a grade 1 class for students in standardized assessment, students were reading the story “A Fine, Fine, School.” After the read-aloud, students divided into small groups and were asked to retell the story including key details and the central message. Differentiated leveled templates were provided to each group.
- Classroom teachers collaborate with speech teachers developing more cognitively challenging questions. In a middle school class for students in standardized assessment, students were reading *Leif Ericson’s Voyage*, a *Raz Kids* interactive leveled e-book program. Students were responding to Webb’s (DOK) level 1 questions such as; “When did this happen?”, “Where was he from?” Level 2 questions posed were, “What could have happened if his crew was different?” and “Compare this to the voyage of Christopher Columbus.”

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

High expectations are evident throughout the school organization via the use of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The school has established systematic structures that engage and informs all stakeholders leading to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support the school’s high expectations result in a culture of mutual accountability and effective academic and personal growth for students and adults.

Supporting Evidence

- The school analyzed the feedback provided by the NYC School Survey and identified areas where a disparity was evident. In particular, it was noted that although response was very positive under Effective School leadership, teachers did not feel they had a significant role in school policy and decision making. As a result, the school created an in-house visual model of the school, “Knowing Your School Community” in order to delineate key roles and define responsibilities, and the creation of a Communication Team. The team was developed to disseminate a message of high expectations and facilitate teacher understanding of the importance of all stakeholders in the school.
- School leaders provide ongoing professional development with regard to implementing best practices identified in the *Framework for Teaching* with a focus on components 1E, 3B, and 3C. Teachers stated that school leaders provide “next steps” during post-observations which are linked to the targeted components of the *Framework*. School leaders stated that feedback collected from workshops, for staff and families, are used to inform future professional development activities”.
- High expectations for class work and behavior are modeled by staff as seen in classrooms visited. Positive affirmations are posted and students are reminded of academic and behavioral expectations for instruction as lessons are introduced. Skills such as self-awareness and self-management are actively taught, thereby addressing college and career readiness skills.
- There is an emphasis on communication and partnerships with families. Parents stated the school provides them with “worthwhile workshops” to support academic and behavioral achievement of student goals. *Get Ready to Learn*, a movement-based program which prepares students to be in optimal readiness to process information, and *Cook Shop* which teaches students about healthy food choices, are offered to parents as part of the parallel instructional initiative in addition to technology and English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies. In addition, a parent stated there is consistent outreach and support from all staff members, “I always know what my child is learning and going to learn in school. This helps me to help him.”