



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 111 Jacob Blackwell

Elementary-Middle School Q111

**37-15 13 Street
Queens
NY 11101**

Principal: Dionne Jaggon

**Date of review: April 19, 2016
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

The School Context

P.S. 111 Jacob Blackwell is an elementary-middle school with 287 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 41% Black, 48% Hispanic, and 6% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 29% students with disabilities. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 88.6%.

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	Developing
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	Developing
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	Developing
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	Developing
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	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The majority of teachers is assigned to teacher teams and engage in structured professional collaborations that are loosely connected to school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work.

Impact

The use of an inquiry approach is developing across teams resulting in improved teacher practice or progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers engage in regularly scheduled meetings in accordance with the schools' motto, "Teamwork makes the dream work!" Some of the staff shared that due to the inquiry meetings they have adjusted the way they look at differentiated instruction so every child will be able to meet the standards. Furthermore, some teachers shared that the meetings provide them the opportunity to focus on selected students and their advancement towards achieving specific goals. For example, data indicated that students had difficulty in elaborating on an idea in their writing. As a result of inquiry work, the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum was adjusted. The content is now taught over three days rather than one day, as had been previously planned.
- Inquiry meeting protocols appear to be established, although routines are not yet consistently followed. Teachers regularly meet to discuss student work, teaching practices and efforts to improve achievement. To ensure that the teacher teams are productive, the school's leaders leveraged their resources and provided an additional period where the instructional leaders would meet with the teams, provide guidance, and keep everyone on task.
- At an inquiry team meeting teachers reviewed two pieces of student writing for strengths and weaknesses. Although students were not provided a rubric during the writing process, teachers evaluated the student work samples against a Teacher's College writing rubric. Several teachers shared strengths evident in the writing, including the student's volume, topic selection, use of transition words, and clarity of the reasons cited for their position. Weaknesses were identified and instructional next steps were to include specific rubric components, such as, better organization, stronger lead for the introduction, and elaboration of ideas. Although the teachers discussed several student outcomes, it was not clear they were normed in their understanding of what these instructional strategies may look like as they move forward to further engage their students.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best.

Impact

The Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and instructional shifts are informing teaching practices and beginning to result in aligned curricula. Across classrooms there is an uneven level of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus stresses explicit teaching of instructional skills, opportunity for students' independent thinking, purposeful differentiation, and higher-order thinking strategies. However, these skills were not consistently observed across classrooms.
- During a math class, the teacher referred to academically related vocabulary, such as the term "compound." Students were asked what they thought it meant. One student responded directly to the teacher saying "two words, like cowboy." Some other students agreed and added more detail such as "it will be two or more events." The teacher did not correct or clarify the two shared thoughts, but rather redirected the students to read quickly and find the important information from their text. Most of the discussions were between the teacher and student, although opportunities were presented for students to engage with one another. In a writing class, the teacher explicitly told the students to "turn and talk" about a topic. However, most students did not turn and talk or use the prompt, and remained off topic, yet the teacher stated "excellent job." Although teachers appear to understand the value of students being engaged in peer discussions, accountable talk is not implemented coherently or effectively to allow for critical thinking and participation.
- In ELA, inconsistent practices were observed to support students through differentiated tasks. In one class, the teacher informed her students that their selection process for a topic in poetry needed to be developed. As such, four varied tasks were assigned to groups of students where they would generate five topic ideas for a poem. The various groups collaborated with either the teacher or para-professional at each respective group. Conversely, in another ELA class, with students assigned to three different tasks, the teacher read or asked the children to read their books, stating, "I saw you reading it and know you are doing so well," although most children were unable to recognize the letters or words on the page. Similar inconsistencies were observed throughout other lessons. In a 12:1:1 class, although discussion prompts were attached to student desks, when students were encouraged to turn and talk with a partner about components of the story, they were not reminded to refer to their prompts limiting the depth and focus of their discussions.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Additionally, curricula and academic tasks reflect planning to provide students access to curricula and tasks

Impact

The curricula are beginning to reflect tasks that will allow a diversity of students to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Building leaders shared that data indicates that students need a great deal of support to be able to access the curricula. Several curriculum resources have been adopted to coherently emphasize the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. However, the adjustments and modifications that have been made do not completely align to meet the needs of the diverse student population across grades and content areas. For example, the *GO Math!* program offers some differentiation for English Language Learners and has a literacy focus, but lacks the inclusion of technology and problem-solving opportunities for enrichment.
- A review of curriculum planning documents reveals inconsistencies in the development of lessons designed to meet the needs of the school's diverse population. Some lesson planning documents include purposeful grouping of students through the inclusion of support groups, strategic groups, and enrichment groups where one is guided, partnered, and independent respectively. However, specific learning scaffolds or extensions for the groups were not in evidence in the plans. In another planning document, both groups identified as high and low have the same question assigned, although one group is referenced to analyze the author's language and word choice. Several lesson plan documents have no reference to differentiated instruction. This lack of planned integration of strategies to engage students in learning leads to missed opportunities for students who require supports to have access to the curricula.
- The use of the Teachers College Writing curriculum resources are used and developed by teachers for core content unit planning. For example, a grade 3 writing unit plan includes connections to previous learning and references interdisciplinary connections. However, no specific detail is provided other than a focus question. A grade 5 math unit plan entitled "how can you solve decimal multiplication problems?" is indicated as an interdisciplinary connection for the use of transition words. Such general interdisciplinary connections do not permit cohesive alignment of content or integration of the instructional shifts, hence limiting cognitive engagement for students across grades and content areas.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The school is developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Teacher’s assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Assessments are in place but results are inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction so that teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The collection of data is conducted through a wide range of processes including formative and summative assessments. The findings are not consistently used to adjust curricula or instruction. For example, benchmark assessments are administered and results are shared weekly with staff and students. However, significant student increases in achievement on both the ELA and math New York State assessments are not expected or represented in data trail documents. Staff stated they are trying to “get behind the student misconceptions and areas of struggle to do more than we have been doing, so we are pushing discussion so students are engaged with each other.”
- Specific targeted approaches to close the achievement gap for students are referenced through progress monitoring reports. In most classes visited, the use of checks for understanding was absent or merely procedural with limited feedback to students. For example, several students were unable to articulate their feedback of “glows and grows” from their teachers on their student work. When asked about understanding their next steps on an assignment, most students did not understand how the comments were actionable. Some students also shared that if they were absent for a portfolio assignment, they did not have to complete it.
- The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is used to benchmark all students and evaluate their reading proficiency. The benchmark level for the mid-year assessment was that students were to meet expectations. The data is tracked and analyzed, however, the results show the vast majority of students are well below meeting expectations. It is not clear how the data is used to review, reteach, and guide instruction to further close the achievement gap for students.
- Students receive rubrics on many of their important tasks, especially those that are saved for their portfolio folders. Many of the students in the upper grades were able to explain how they use the rubrics when given a task or feedback, but none of the younger students in the primary grades could explain how the feedback is used to guide their next steps or how to use the rubric to help them better understand their own work.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

School leaders and staff are developing expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness. Additionally, teacher teams and staff are establishing a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact

Feedback to families regarding student progress toward meeting college and career readiness and guidance supports are developing in the level of detail and clarity needed to help prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents shared they are “in constant communication with their child’s teacher regarding what they are learning on a very personal level.” Parents receive flyers, phone calls, and are welcome to sit in the classroom whenever they want. However, supports for families to help them understand the expectations necessary for college and career readiness and tracking of student progress is limited to report cards with numbers and teacher comments. Parents stated they do not receive progress reports. Some shared that *Class Dojo*, an online communication tool, is used by a few of the teachers.
- Specific preparation for students to further their educational experience and prepare them for the state exams includes opportunities with after-school activities and Saturday classes. Children are encouraged to practice for state assessments through online programs as well. Some of these efforts are seen as not enough by parents, especially for students on the low- and high-end of the achievement spectrum. Parents shared they would like to see more supports for their children while parents of high achieving students shared their children could use additional challenging work.
- Students in grade 8 said the school provides guidance for the entire high school process so they select appropriate high schools and know why they have chosen them. Grade 7 students said they are not thinking about high school yet, although they are “aware that they give us advice if we need it.”
- Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) systems have been purposefully initiated to set clear expectations regarding student behavior. The school community believes that a students’ academic success begins with clear communication of behaviors, monitoring those behaviors, and providing strong structured supports to ensure that they are in evidence. Additionally, portfolios are maintained in all core content areas for each student to demonstrate the needed skills for articulation. A cover page showcases the assignments in each core class on the portfolio folder along with the score or rubric rating. However, many student folders appear to be missing assignments.