



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 115 The James J. Ambrose School

Elementary School Q115

**80-51 261 Street
Queens
NY 11004**

Principal: Kathleen Sciortino

**Date of review: April 1, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

The School Context

P.S. 115 The James J. Ambrose School is an elementary school with 702 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 68% Asian, 6% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 9% White students. The student body includes 7% English Language Learners and 9% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 96.2%.

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	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 <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	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	Additional Findings	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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty engage in a rigorous process of curriculum development that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and emphasizes rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

As a result, there is coherence across grades and subjects and students are engaged in curricula that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- An examination of unit plans reveals attention to the needs of individual students. Unit plans across subjects contain rigorous content that promotes critical thinking and problem solving skills. An English as a second language component is embedded into plans so that English Language Learners (ELLs) must demonstrate their thinking. The school uses *ReadyGen* supplemented by *Fountas and Pinnell* reading levels and *EngageNY* writing tasks. *GO Math!* has been supplemented with *Exemplars*. The science program is aligned to the New York State Scope and Sequence and supplemented by *Full Option Science System* kits. All social studies units are aligned to the New York State Scope and Sequence and supplemented with *ReadyGen* units. The emphasis on increasing non-fiction reading and solving real life problems is evident in all content area curricula. Assessing rigor in tasks and fusing high-level questioning into the curriculum has created a path toward college and career readiness.
- *ReadyGen* lessons have been revised to increase the use of text evidence and multiple entry points aligned with the instructional shifts. Thinking maps are embedded into all subject areas to scaffold learning and organize thinking. Academic language is infused into the curriculum with coherence across grades and subject areas. There is consistent use of academic vocabulary in math concepts. *Go Math!* is used as a base program, along with math tasks that focus on the writing process to ensure rigorous habits to extend student thinking by asking them to explain their process. In a multi-grade special education class, students were working in table groups studying an article on the Great Wall of China. Students were defining and discussing academic vocabulary and domain-specific words in the text. Some students were citing information to better understand the text and were reviewing sentence starters to express their responses. Small group work and differentiated activities where students interact with one another are evident across lesson plans and meet the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs.
- The grade level curriculum units in science and social studies are aligned to match texts in the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum with a focus on using thinking maps and strategy charts to solidify instructional coherence. A review of the unit plans and curriculum maps indicates a coherence of planning that includes the use of scaffolds and extensions to ensure rigor across grades and content areas. There are math talks, question and discussion protocols as well as the use of close reading and English as a second language support strategies. Higher-order questions within differentiated groups provide multiple entry points and access to the same learning outcomes for all students.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Across the majority of classrooms, teaching practices reflect a coherent set of beliefs informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and emphasize student thinking and participation.

Impact

All learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in work products. However, in some cases there are missed opportunities to push the thinking of the highest achieving learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices include differentiated activities and the use of instructional strategies that address the learning needs of a diverse population. In classrooms visited, teachers conferred with groups of students, while others were engaged in peer-to-peer discussions. Students expressed themselves confidently and one student stated that because he is a good reader he reads ahead in the class. Instruction has shifted from being predominantly teacher-centered to increased collaborative learning opportunities for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities. In a kindergarten class, ELLs and gifted and talented students were working in heterogeneous groups to answer the question, “What would you plant in your garden and why?” Students were discussing their ideas and assigning roles based on learning styles, such as artist, discussion leader, and writer.
- A review of student work across classrooms revealed a consistent focus on writing across the grades. Writing exemplars are used to make criteria visible and to allow students to self-assess. Most lessons include strategies to encourage higher-order thinking activities. For example, students are required to outline their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with each other. Checklists and visual supports allowed students to self-monitor for organization on independent work. Visual supports are used to provide scaffolds for ELLs, students with disabilities, and struggling learners. In a grade 3 ELA class, students used a task-specific rubric and sat Socratic circles to determine if they had examined a text closely.
- There was evidence of grouping or pairing to assist in creating meaningful work products. Students were engaged in discussions using research skills and discussion protocols. In one class, the reading of *Martin’s Venture* led to a discussion on bold guessing, how it leads to what could happen, and why experimenting with new ideas matters. Students in grade 4 were in leveled groups solving problems of perimeter. Each group had a task card and discussion protocols. Delectable division was discussed as a means to further engagement and learning in relation to real life situations. High levels of student thinking and participation were observed in a grade 2 lesson on parks. However, there are some missed opportunities for enrichment activities for students at higher levels. In particular, in math classes there were missed opportunities to extend math talks to promote deeper learning via student discussions.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

All teachers across the vast majority of classrooms use or create assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula and provide a clear portrait of student mastery. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals.

Impact

As a result, students and teachers receive actionable and meaningful feedback. In addition, assessment practices inform curricular and instructional decisions that positively impact student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers track student progress and make effective instructional adjustments to meet all student-learning needs, including ELLs and students with disabilities. There are uniform assessments and rubrics across grades related to projects. Gathering data and monitoring each student's progress over time is embedded into the schoolwide system, leading to a clear system of actionable feedback to further learning outcomes. All teachers use common assessments and adjust as needed. This is very clear in the younger grades as evidenced by the baseline assessment data charts. Teachers have created or modified rubrics and checklists aligned to key standards for each unit of study based on pre- and post-assessments built into the *GO Math!* and *ReadyGen* programs. In the lower grades, the use of *Fountas and Pinnell* running records to supplement data is directly aligned to the Common Core.
- Embedded in each unit of study are multiple opportunities for informal assessment such as exit slips to check for understanding. A variety of graphic organizers that include t-charts, KWL charts, and anchor charts allow students to self-assess. There is actionable feedback for understanding embedded into every lesson. Teachers use conferencing notes to inform next teaching and learning steps. Students were seen self- and peer-assessing, editing work, and examining feedback on their task rubric from the teacher.
- Before lessons, students are exposed to a variety of pre-assessments that include verbal and written tasks. There is meaningful data from formal and informal assessments to show increased student growth. Formative, periodic and summative assessments are used to plan and align lessons to meet the needs of all students and assist in planning professional learning opportunities to support this work. During a grade 4 math lesson on perimeters, pre-assessment work was given to determine students struggling with basic concepts. This assessment was used to create small groups for re-teaching. In a kindergarten Integrated Co-Teaching class students were solving math problems using frames and visual clues. With feedback from peers and teachers, students were challenging each other on solving problems using different strategies.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

There is a culture of learning based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* that reflects the high expectations shared by faculty, families and students.

Impact

As a result, there is a sense of mutual accountability for teaching and learning that permeates the environment of the school. In addition, families are active in supporting students on their path to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Professional learning cycles emphasize high expectations through professional workshops and learning communities. Focuses include teaching practices, assessment, aligning units to standards, and connecting strategies to instruction. The professional development workshops are presented by school leaders with extensive teaching experience who provide clear expectations for pedagogical and professional practice via verbal and written communication. Teachers feel supported through workshops and cycles of performance feedback that is constructive and actionable. Team meetings and regular meetings with the principal as well as the faculty handbook flash drive further communicate these high expectations. New teachers are provided with bi-monthly meetings to build content knowledge and instructional skills. All teachers participate in study groups and planning sessions. There are professional learning opportunities for groups and individual teachers to promote and enhance teaching practices that impact professional growth and student learning.
- To increase partnering with parents and families there are open invitations to visit classrooms in any grade. Teachers regularly engage students and families regarding college and career readiness through the implementation of strategies linking academic knowledge to social and emotional learning. Teachers regularly meet with parents to discuss their child's progress not only during the Tuesday parent engagement time, but in the early morning and after school as well. A school website was created for staff to stay in touch with the entire school community and there is a web page for every grade. Parents stay informed via phone calls and emails from teachers as well as email blasts from school leaders. In addition, a monthly newsletter is sent home. The school is reading *Beyond the Bake Sale* to further establish partnerships with families to support student progress.
- Parents stated that the school has an open door policy and clear lines of communication between all constituencies. At the parent meeting one parent stated, "Teachers are engaged in getting the kids engaged and they are succeeding because our children come home excited to learn." Another parent stated, "There is a culture of learning and I wish my child could stay in this school forever." Parents shared that the writing program is intense and there are always comments on rubrics with next steps.
- Teachers prepare students for college and career readiness by building independence in academic and personal behaviors. Persistence, engagement, effective work habits and organizational skills are consistently stressed in all classes. In student council the students learn public speaking techniques and present to their constituents, teaching them responsibility and furthering career and college readiness.

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

Findings

The majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based structured professional collaborations. Leadership structures provide a means for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and teaching practices.

Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in schoolwide instructional coherence, improved pedagogy and student work. Teachers play an integral role in making decision that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams assess students using *Fountas and Pinnell* to ensure consistency across classrooms and grades. Data from running records is used to group students and is discussed at both grade and vertical team meetings. Cross-grade teams meet to compare student notes and discuss data, creating an awareness of where students are challenged and where they need to go. One vertical team looked at an item skills analysis in ELA across grades K-5, focusing on main idea and details. In math, teacher teams analyze data from Spatial Temporal Math, a math program used in the computer lab.
- There is evidence of effective collaboration among teachers within all grades both vertically and horizontally. Google Drive is used as a tool during meetings to share information. Each grade has developed a professional learning community that includes the special education teacher, specialists in English as a second language, and guidance personnel. Teams use uniform protocols to review student work and a toolkit of strategies to improve outcomes for all students, especially ELLs and students with disabilities. Teacher teams reflect on planning and lessons with a focus on strengths and next steps. Teams have developed unit plans in reading, writing and math based on the Common Core and infused their own work with *ReadyGen* and *GO Math!*. Lesson plans created by teacher teams are formulated to give guided reading and small group support and often model both academic vocabulary and content area vocabulary.
- There is ongoing professional development in response to trends. Current observation data indicates that the instructional capacity of teachers has strengthened resulting in improved student outcomes. Teacher teams are reading *The Data Coach's Guide* to build upon collaborative inquiry.
- Vertical teams meet one time a month formally with informal meetings often occurring and focus on data analysis and looking at trends to change instruction. This is further supported by intervisitations scheduled by the teachers. Teachers stated that since the advent of Glass Walls, the school's practice of opening up of one another's classrooms, they now have more interest in working across grades to better meet the needs of students. Teachers share methods to gain insight into their own strengths and challenges and were seen reflecting on their practice during a team meeting. Teachers provide feedback, schedule and track visits, adjust curriculum tasks and share best practices, further embedding distributed leadership structures.