



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

I.S. 227 Louis Armstrong

Middle School Q227

**32-02 Junction Boulevard
Queens
NY 11369**

Principal: Helen Ponella

**Date of review: March 18, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Luz T. Cortazzo**

The School Context

I.S. 227 Louis Armstrong is a middle school with 1,571 students from grade 5 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 14% Asian, 10% Black, 48% Hispanic, and 27% White students. The student body includes 5% English Language Learners and 14% students with disabilities. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 96.6%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

High expectations are systematically conveyed to the entire school community including teachers, students and parents through timely ongoing communication, and delivery of effective feedback and guidance supports.

Impact

Structures that support high expectations assure a mutual accountability among staff and families play an active role in supporting students to meet expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have clearly defined standards for professional development, including professional development plans jointly develop with staff input and classroom practices embedding elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* which emulate a culture where accountability is reciprocal between all constituents.
- In the parent meeting, parents were able to speak about the ongoing feedback to families, clear lines of verbal and written communication, online progress reports, parent/teacher conferences, parent informational sessions and workshops, student planner, parent handbook and student led conferences with families to deepen their understanding of college and career readiness expectations for their children and empower them to help support their children in meeting those expectations.
- The school orchestrates ongoing events and creates multiple opportunities to partner with and engage families in learning, fostering their participation in a culture of high expectations connected to college readiness and events where they receive information to support student progress towards meeting those expectations.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curriculum. Common assessments allow teachers to track student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

The school has varied rubrics and checklists to guide process and provide feedback to students; however, feedback sometimes varies in quality and, as a performance benchmark for selected standards, do not demonstrate a clear portrait of student increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has adopted various rubrics and checklists that detail student behavior, expectations for group work, the process for accomplishing a task, and criteria charts. For example, the school has a class work and homework rubric, a Socratic Seminar rubric, and also adapts generic rubric for specific tasks such as the tee-shirt task in math. Across classrooms students were observed referring to the rubrics and using criteria charts to ensure that they followed the steps in the activity that they were participating in. In conversations with students they were able to articulate the lesson's objectives and knew the routines and structures of the class. However, during a student interview only 2 students were able to directly state how feedback from rubrics stapled to their work helped them improve their work. Other students had checklists in their portfolios instead of rubrics and some students stated they did not have actionable and meaningful feedback regarding their achievement.
- While the school has analyzed the results of the June state exams to determine priority standards for the content and grade and determine trends and inform the development of instructional strategies, specific benchmark goals for these standards were not clear. Additionally, while instruction was aligned with the trends observed, it was unclear how the common assessments used at the school created a clear portrait of student mastery for these prioritized standards. For example, data from the mid-year assessment provided student by student assessment performance across a wide variety of standards. This assessment was not specific to the standard being prioritized. The common assessment measured a cross section of standards and skills and did not provide data-defined student information. Moreover, sub-group information specific to the standard and to meet a defined standard benchmark. While students may show and an overall improvement, the improvement might not be in the priority standard, but in other standards.
- The school has common assessment data on standards, Measure of Student Learning, and Lexile levels. However, this information is kept in a class by class format. Currently the school does not keep data by grade or by subgroup making it difficult to see performance at a glance in order to track progress.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across classrooms, instructional practices demonstrate the school's philosophy on how students learn best and purposely offer all students access to the curricula and exposure to higher-order thinking skills.

Impact

School-wide practices are evident across grades and subjects. Multiple entry points and high quality supports result in high levels of student thinking and participation across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers across classrooms provide students with challenging learning tasks that require them to use critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving as evidenced in one English class. The task encouraged inquiry, collaboration, and ownership among students as evidence by the student discussion. Students were divided into two groups and were discussing the Fourth Amendments and illegal searches. They were examining the tension that exists between the right to privacy and the obligation to protect the public welfare. One student stated, "Well if we think that a terrorist is plotting something, then we have to take their phone away because it has the evidence that we need." Another student stated, "I disagree. We don't have the right to take away a person's property because we think that the person might be a terrorist. The person has a right to privacy." The other student stated, the national good outweighs privacy. Another student said, "Prove it then. The government just can't invade the privacy of its citizens."
- In a grade 8 Living Environment class, students discussed their understanding of Darwin's theory of evolution to real life species. Teaching practices included inquiry, project-based and collaborative learning, questioning and discussions that promote high levels of thinking and participation. Strategic use of scaffolding techniques, needs-based grouping, activation of prior knowledge, building of academic vocabulary, effective use of graphic organizers, and technology provided multiple entry points to the lesson and tasks for all learners including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.
- Teaching practices observed included leverage strategies such as inquiry, project-based and collaborative learning, questioning, and discussion that promote high levels of thinking, as observed in the science, math and English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms visited.
- The school's beliefs on how students learn best are influenced by the priorities of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and Common Core Learning Standards instructional shifts and supported by teachers' innovative pedagogical practices. Across a great number of classrooms, teacher practices consistently support school-wide beliefs aligned to curricula, and shaped by teacher team and faculty input as evidenced during the grade 8 math team.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and coherently embedded across grades and subjects.

Impact

Students are exposed to a rigorous Common Core-aligned curriculum that demands thinking and participation for all students and prepares students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a strategy for reading and writing across all discipline areas. This structure, called ACE (Answer with a claim, Cite two specific pieces of evidence and Explain how the citations support the claim), ensures the shifts of close reading, highlighting text as well as annotations, supporting claims with the citation of textual evidence and explaining the evidence to connect it to the claim. This strategy is embedded in all ELA, science and social studies units across all subjects. In addition, in grade eight, there is specific attention to applying this strategy to counterclaims.
- In math, the instructional strategy of Concrete, Representational, Abstract and Words or C.R.A.W, is use by students across all grades. Students use manipulatives to represent the numbers and symbols to represent the abstract concepts before using words to explain and justify their work. This strategy supports the math instructional shifts as well as the mathematical practices by ensuring that students develop conceptual knowledge, deep understanding, fluency and application.
- In grade eight social studies unit on World War I, students used primary and secondary sources to explore the role that propaganda plays in war. After analyzing real propaganda posters and assessing their impact on state involvement in the war, students develop their own poster with the purpose of highlighting the role propaganda plays in war.
- A grade eight Regents lab requires students to compare and contract two theories of evolution (Darwin and Lamarck) and to explain how new traits are obtained. Students need to examine the strengths and weakness of each of theory and to use write an essay explaining which one of these theories does not support modern day genetics. Student are required to use the ACE format. Instruction provides scaffolds to ensure ELLs and students with disabilities can demonstrate their thinking through the work products they are asked to create.
- In a grade six ratio math task, students are provided with model sentences to present the ratios. Students are also asked to state the frequency of the objects and to simplify the ratios. Students use the C.R.A.W method, a method used across the school to support coherence across grades.

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

The vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry work systematically analyzing the impact of teacher practice and strengthening leadership roles. Teacher teams play an integral role in school decisions and are currently expanding their work, and deepening their study of the needs of individual students.

Impact

The work of teacher teams results in teacher leadership throughout the school, and deep understanding of the instructional practices that impact student learning. This has resulted in increased student achievement, monitoring of progress, and determination of goals and next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet during Monday professional learning time and during common department and/or team planning time to engage in norming and analysis of student work, review and adjust department pacing calendars, to develop common assessments, and to develop strategies for selected students in target groups. Additionally, content instructional coaches are in place to represent the teacher voice in school-wide policies, instruction, and professional development in conjunction with the Professional Learning Committee ensuring that teachers partake in shared responsibilities and shared leadership. Teachers stated that they have ownership and a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. During the teacher team meetings, teachers stated that as a result of their teacher teams' professional learning, they strategically adjust their practice to improve quality of questions and prompts, use of discussion techniques, and standards-based tasks. They have a choice of instructional materials and resources to be used, as well as a voice in appropriate structure and pacing of lessons.
- Teachers meet in Professional Learning Cycles (PLC) to reflect, analyze, and implement best practices to meet the needs of all learners, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Teacher teams clearly articulate how they implement structured professional collaborations using protocols to norm student work and other structures to strengthen teacher capacity as they create, revise and adopt curricula to ensure effective integration of the instructional shifts across grades content areas as evidenced during the grade 7 ELA team meeting.
- Teachers collaborate to strategize lessons, learning opportunities, and rigorous assessments that are rooted in the Common Core in order to increase mastery of content and skills. Teacher teams work collaboratively to track the effectiveness of strategies implemented in their classrooms to ensure that student mastery of standards is achieved as evidenced during the grade 8 math team.