



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 234

Elementary School Q234

**30-15 29th Street
Queens
NY 11102**

Principal: Dora Danner

**Date of review: October 29, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Luz T. Cortazzo**

The School Context

P.S. 234 is an elementary school with 604 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 24% Asian, 5% Black, 38% Hispanic, and 31% White students. The student body includes 22% English Language Learners and 15% 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 95.1%.

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	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	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

School leaders and faculty communicate a culture of high expectations for teaching, professional collaboration, and consistent communication focused on best practices for teaching and learning.

Impact

As a result teachers share a sense of mutual accountability for all students to meet expectations and students take an active role in their learning experience.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders, and other staff members work as a team in study groups, such as the Academic Language one, Grade/Cluster Leaders, Model Classroom Leaders, Data Specialists Grade Leaders, New Teacher Induction Committee and Professional Learning Committee. During these daily, weekly and monthly meetings, participants discuss goals and action plans, develop professional development plans and create strategies to ensure all school goals are met. There is a culture of professionalism in which staff members are equal partners in decision making, thus ensuring a high level of success in teaching and learning across the school. This was evidenced during classroom visits, review of the yearly professional development plan, and discussions during the Professional Learning Committee meeting as the team discussed teacher progress based on differentiated professional development and next steps based on teacher and student needs.
- Teachers share that the administration support their development through frequent professional learning focused on high expectations for all students. Through ongoing feedback, on-site and off-site intervisitations, teachers are able to meet the rigorous set of expectations for teaching and learning. Furthermore, a review of several Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) evaluator forms reveals that teachers are on target towards meeting those expectations.
- Students communicated teachers consistently provide them with feedback. Shared work during the student meeting indicated teacher feedback, student reflection, and student made revisions as a result of targeted feedback provided. Teachers offer students after school programs such as the SOAR to Success program for the bottom third students as well as English Language Learners (ELLs). Additionally, to support classroom instruction, teachers have developed academic intervention plans for at risk students based on, for example, Universal Design for Learning and Response to Intervention.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practice strategies provide entry points into lessons for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, though extensions and high-quality supports are not yet consistent across all classrooms.

Impact

As a result, not all students are challenged to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills and own their educational experience.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, lessons are consistently informed by the Danielson *Framework for Learning* organized to the workshop model, and include mini-lessons that are connected to previous concepts to provide multiple entry points and increase engagement. For example, in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) grade 2 class, students engaged in collecting information from a text to answer the question; “How do farms influence a community”? Students had structured opportunities to engage in differentiated tasks on their own or with their peers to build critical thinking skills with the aid of graphic organizers, video, visual prompts and discussion prompts. However, in some classrooms, tasks are still heavily scaffold and teacher-directed, hindering student independence and ownership.
- Teachers plan lessons and use scaffolds to provide multiple entry points into instruction in response to student’s needs and interests, including students with disabilities. The use of word walls across classrooms helps all students build their vocabulary. Also, the school focuses on supporting ELLs by hiring only certified ELL teachers. However, lessons do not always challenge all students, particularly high performers, to their full potential, in that sometimes assignments do not include opportunities for them to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills or extend their learning, thus limiting even greater learning outcomes.
- During classroom visits, teachers planned questions in their lessons and posed questions of varying cognitive levels. For example, in a grade 5 math class, students discussed with a partner what happens when they don’t follow the order of operations. Students turn and talk responding to the question, and some students expanded their thinking by adding on to statements posed by others. However, this level of questioning and discourse was not evident in all classrooms.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure the alignment of curricula to standards and instructional shifts through designing engaging, rigorous instruction to support diverse learners' needs.

Impact

Curricular decisions lead to coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Across subjects teachers make intentional decisions based on student data to emphasize key standards and promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The reading, writing and math units of study align with the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Successful strategies include a focus on content vocabulary instruction. Students are able to articulate, cite and include content specific vocabulary in their writing, access grade-level complex text, engage in high quality discussions using text-based responses, and problem solve through reading and writing.
- Teachers ensure that learners are able to access curriculum through thoughtful collaborative planning based on a thorough review of student work and data, as evidenced by the kindergarten, second, and fifth grade writing units reviewed.
- In a grade 5 math classroom, students learned about the fundamentals of the order of operations, engage in using the order of operations to evaluate numerical expressions, and engaged with a partner in a discussion about what happens if the order of operations is not follow. The shift of conceptual understanding, providing deeper understanding of concepts, and applying learning to real world problems were explicit during the lesson and in reviewed curricular documents. Lesson plans also emphasized higher-order thinking skills, depth of understanding and critical reasoning, making the independent practice rich.
- Curriculum and academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grade and subject areas for ELLs and students with disabilities. Differentiation, modifications, and multiple entry points were provided across classrooms visited, where most students had different assignments and product outcome expectations to meet their individual academic needs, as evidenced in lesson plans reviewed in all classroom visits.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms teachers use common assessments aligned to curricula and consistently provide actionable feedback. However effective use of ongoing checks for understanding varies across classrooms.

Impact

The school's assessment practices result in actionable feedback to students, yet day to day adjustments to maximize student learning are not yet fully incorporated across all classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula-aligned assessments practices are implemented to monitor students' progress and provide actionable feedback. Informal assessments include checklists, unit exams, projects and conference notes which provide authentic information on student performance and progress. However, effective lesson adjustments based on checks for understanding varies across the school.
- Classroom visits and meetings with teachers indicated that the school uses ongoing assessments to group students and adjust lesson plans as well as provide feedback on student work including next steps. Students say that teachers confer with them and give them strategies on how to improve their work and they are able to plan for next steps that have led to improvement in their learning process. However, classroom visits also indicated that teachers across the vast majority of classrooms do not always fully utilize checks for understanding to make immediate adjustments in daily lessons. For example, in an ELL class most students had quickly completed the task but the teacher still gave a lengthy explanation to the entire class. Similarly, in a Reader's Workshop lesson, the teacher did not accurately assess that most students understood the task and dedicated a great deal of lesson time to explanation and introduction before sending the students to work independently, thereby minimizing independent work time and opportunities for students, particularly for higher achieving students, to engage in rich, high-level thinking and discussion with peers.
- All teachers use and create English Language Arts, math and content area rubrics to provide written feedback to students. This is a consistent practice across the school, as evidenced on hallway bulletin boards and shared during the student meeting. For example, grade 5 students learned about the pros and cons of drinking chocolate milk in school as part of their opinion writing unit. The task for students was to read the article "Nutrition in Disguise", conduct research, and write a letter to the principal stating reasons based on facts as to why chocolate milk should be served in school. Students were required to explain clearly the reasons why chocolate milk should be served in schools. The student stated that a grade 5 opinion writing rubric and the teacher's comments, "your letter is well-organized with an inviting introduction that draws the reader in and a satisfying conclusion that leaves the reader with a sense of closure and resolution" helped her to continue to achieve high grades.

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

Teachers participate in inquiry work systematically analyzing the impact of teacher practice and strengthening leadership roles. Teacher teams play an integral role in key 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.

Supporting Evidence

- During both teacher team meetings, teachers articulated that school leaders promote an environment whereby teacher team discussions and professional development, led by teachers around oral language, aligning math units of study with the performance task, and higher-order questioning, drive the work of school improvement and establish a collaborative culture focused on student achievement. The school provides many opportunities for distributive leadership through the various leadership teams within the school including a professional learning committee, new teacher induction committee, inquiry team committee, and school leadership team. The principal shared that she strongly believes in capacity building and the use of multiple teams empowers teachers to take on leadership roles.
- Teachers are divided into grade bands that meet on a daily and weekly basis and extend their work during professional development on Mondays and Tuesdays to engage in inquiry work. The focus this year is around developing rigorous oral language. Grade level teams meet weekly to analyze student work and data as evidenced by the data team meeting. The data team refined their focus for the grade 4 targeted students based on review of a constructed-response question. Teachers examined student constructed-responses to identify trends, patterns, and intervention protocols for specific students. A review of the agenda indicated that the team will continue the cycle of inquiry, by making instructional adjustments and collaborating on lessons learned to drive the instructional shifts.
- Distributive leadership is apparent in the school, as staff has input in the development of focus areas for school goals. The school leadership team created a comprehensive needs assessment aligned with *Fountas and Pinnel* findings and focuses on the element of oral language. The team analyzed trends which indicated that teachers should continue to develop teaching practices that call upon students to learn collaboratively, ask questions, and engage in discussions that promote high level thinking. These practices ensure that all stakeholders have a key voice in the decisions that affect the school. Administration and teacher leaders are able to identify distributed leadership structures that are deeply-rooted in the school's day to day operations and articulate how they serve as a medium for teacher input in strategic decisions that affect student achievement.