



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**P.S. 239**

**Elementary School Q239**

**17-15 Weirfield Street  
Queens  
NY 11385**

**Principal: Michele Dwzonek**

**Date of review: January 28, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

## The School Context

P.S. 239 is an elementary school with 618 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 13% Asian, 2% Black, 75% Hispanic, and 9% White students. The student body includes 27% English Language Learners and 22% students with disabilities. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

| <b>Instructional Core</b>  |                            |                   |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i>   | <b>Area of:</b>            | <b>Rating:</b>    |
| 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   | <b>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
| 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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products | <b>Focus</b>               | <b>Proficient</b> |
| 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   | <b>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
| <b>School Culture</b>  |                            |                   |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i>   | <b>Area of:</b>            | <b>Rating:</b>    |
| 3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations  | <b>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
| <b>Systems for Improvement</b>   |                            |                   |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i>   | <b>Area of:</b>            | <b>Rating:</b>    |
| 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning   | <b>Celebration</b>         | <b>Proficient</b> |

## Area of Celebration

|                           |   |                |                   |
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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that consistently analyze assessment data and student work to promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards.

### Impact

Inquiry processes by teacher teams strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers, typically resulting in improved teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams are structured in a four-phase cycle of inquiry to support targeted groups of students at different achievement levels. Phase One requires the staff to identify the problem of practice and the target population. During Phase Two teachers engage in research to identify current and successful strategies. Phase Three provides all team members the opportunity to share out their research findings and discuss next steps. Phase Four is the conclusion of the cycle where the team agrees to identify the most effective strategy and suggests how it will inform instruction. A review of several cycle of inquiry documents revealed findings inclusive of the development of a mechanics checklist to assess student understanding of writing strategies in grade 3 writing, the use of place value flip charts and discussion strategies while solving place value related word problems in grade 4 math, and the provision of a pre-made web for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) in kindergarten.
- Grade 3 teachers reviewed samples of personal narratives from students who achieved a Level 1 or Level 2 on an assignment. Previous inquiry discussions revealed students have difficulty with spelling words that are dictated. Additionally, teachers noticed many of the same students had problems transferring vocabulary from conversation to writing. Through the teacher team inquiry protocol, the Hochman method (a sentence writing research strategy) was identified as a possible way to address this problem and, through professional development, teachers taught the method to others. Staff noted on their discussion sheets that a review of ELLs' overall sentence structures revealed slight improvements and that ELLs are now able to correct run-on sentences when the text is read aloud. Students with disabilities also showed improvement, however, needed a model to guide them, and they continued to struggle to use the method in authentic writing.
- Teachers communicated that their inquiry teams have impacted their instructional practice by "adding to [their] level of knowledge and offering them opportunities to develop differentiated ways of thinking." They further indicated the inquiry process has improved student achievement because the teacher practices have been focused on creating more choices with assignments and students "are more interested in learning so that [leads to] overall increases [in] learning."

## Area of Focus

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.2 Pedagogy</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, student work products and discussions meet the needs of all learners.

### Impact

The alignment of teaching practices with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and instructional shifts has led to high levels of student participation, thinking, and discussions as demonstrated in their work products. However, student ownership across the vast majority of classrooms was not observed.

### Supporting Evidence

- Small group or independent instruction is a central instructional focus observed throughout most classrooms. During an observation of a grade 3 math lesson, students were working in groups on a series of self-selected worksheets aimed at helping them measure the area of an object. One student communicated they selected their worksheet because it “looked easier and more funner,” while another student at the same table assignment took hers because, as she explained, “I need more practice with it, and it is really hard for me to do this and I struggle with this and [it will] help me when I am older because I usually forget things.” When they were done with one worksheet the teacher further explained to the students that they could select another, although it was not clear the students understood why they should or would select one worksheet over another to help them improve their understanding of the learning objective.
- During many observed lessons, teachers engaged students in discussions through the use of questions or relevant tasks, although sometimes student responses were limited to low-level Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* answers or the students were given limited time to apply more high-leveled responses. An example was observed during an English as a New Language class where students were directly told by the teacher what question to ask their peers and were not given an opportunity to develop their own higher-leveled question, although they were able to draft an appropriate answer on a post-it when prompted. During one class, students with disabilities were challenged to discuss comparable fractions with a partner and managed to struggle through and ultimately developed a sense of understanding. Several students were observed counting on their fingers and drawing pictures as supports to aid in their conceptual understanding. During a grade 4 literacy lesson, the teacher asked the students questions about understanding what a “theme” is, although the expected answers were written on the front board for them to state directly from.
- Students in a kindergarten class learning about sequential numbers greater than 20 but less than 30 were asked to “Explain how one could count or use some of the strategies most recently used in class?” Some students understood the clustering of tens while others did not. However, the teachers used highlighter tape to more clearly identify the referenced numbers on the chart. Students used individual dry erase boards, which they sat on following the pre-lesson, where they demonstrated their knowledge of numbers less than 20. The principal suggested the lesson could have been improved if manipulatives were shared with the students to help them understand key concepts.

## Additional Findings

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.1 Curriculum</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards so curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

### Impact

School leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions that build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students, including English Language Learner's and students with disabilities.

### Supporting Evidence

- A review of lesson planning documents reveals a purposeful effort to group students to ensure they are appropriately engaged in their assigned academic task. A grade 1 literacy lesson plan on how people help out in the community includes scaffolds for ELLs at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Beginners are provided visuals, intermediates are asked to describe the scene, while advanced learners are instructed to provide elaboration on what is happening in the garden. During a grade 4 literacy class, planning documents indicate all students are provided access to the reading the first time through an audio playing of the story prior to their independent or group reading. Several other lesson planning documents reference that manipulatives or graphic organizers, inclusive of highlighted vocabulary words or sentence frames, will be provided for students who need them.
- A school-wide initiative to support an increase in student vocabulary complexity has been adopted through a practice referred to as "shades of learning". Shades of learning uses paint color cards often found in big-box hardware stores with increasing tint to model an increase in complexity with relevant vocabulary for all grades and content areas. Examples include angry, frustrated, furious, livid and ugly, hideous, ghastly, repulsive.
- Curriculum maps across grades include the big idea and essential questions for all students and provide scaffolds and extensions for ELLs, students with disabilities, and general education students. For example, a grade 2 curriculum map for literacy identifies the big idea as friends and family. Differentiation of instruction for ELLs or students with disabilities is suggested to use pictures to predict what the story will be about and/or pretend to visit a shelter and describe the kind of pet you would get and why. Enrichment differentiation includes prompts asking students to write about how friends help each other and/or compare how a student's own family celebrations are the same and different than the families in the stories read.
- Lesson plan documents from physical education highlight a focus on objectives of learning to dribble a ball, including psychomotor, cognitive and affective skills. The document includes a rubric to support a conscientious emphasis on rigor related to the use of the foot, control and eye position.

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>2.2 Assessment</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula to determine student progress toward goals in most grades and subject areas. Additionally, teacher's assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### **Impact**

Actionable feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Results from assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction effectively to meet the needs of all students.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Across all math classes, problem solving checklists are used by both teachers and students to assess. Students use problem solving checklists to self and peer assess. Teachers use the checklists to provide feedback to students regarding the completion of protocol. In all grades, students are expected to answer a few questions regarding their planning, problem solving, reasoning and explanation. Additionally, students are expected to identify next steps in addition to the teachers' written out next steps. For students in kindergarten, images are primarily used to assist them with the completion of the checklist.
- Data from benchmark assessments in English Language Arts and math are analyzed and the results are consolidated and shared with the staff regarding the growth measured from October 2015 to January 2016. For each grade and class, students are identified as having met the goal if they achieved a scaled score of 75% or greater.
- Teachers collect assessment results on class report sheets for each student and identify if the student is struggling with a topic or skill, needs extra support, understands the concept, and/or provides additional written notes. On a grade 3 comprehension skill assessment report sheet, several students were noted as needing additional supports, including more clarity in developing synonyms for theme, assistance with mechanics, and a better understanding how to organize a paragraph. Another grade 3 assessment checklist geared more specifically for students with disabilities, indicates students are marked for their ability to identify sentences, fragments, errors in capitalization and punctuation, and their ability to edit. A grade 4 math conferring sheet lists next steps for many students such as reading decimals by using a number line. Additional next steps are general and include suggesting further instruction using a number line, although next steps are not provided for all students.
- A student shared one of her writing samples with feedback from a grade 4 assignment, including a rubric with "positive and negative" feedback at the bottom of the page as indicated by a plus and minus symbol. The student explained she was able to use the feedback from the draft copy to rewrite and submit a final version. The student understood her next steps necessary to improve the assignment task as indicated by the assignment's score increasing from a score of a 74 to an 83 on the revised version. Additionally, the development of the first draft was completed using an organizing evidence chart to assist her in determining if she included all the correct components for her claim. Other students provided examples of similar feedback from their assignments.

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>3.4 High Expectations</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Proficient</b> |
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students and offer ongoing and detailed feedback.

### Impact

A system of accountability for high expectations exists for staff, and students are provided guidance and supports that prepare them for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- Students are informed about college and career readiness during class discussions and building wide initiatives. During College Awareness Day, the principal told teachers to include college themed discussions and assignments or projects in their lesson plans, in addition to wearing college apparel and decorating classroom doors accordingly. Student work samples included homework to research a celebrity and identify their post-secondary education choice of school and major. Many parents shared they appreciated the homework assignment since it encouraged their child to look at the educational choices their idols made. Additionally, the school offers workshops about choices necessary to select and apply to middle schools.
- Students shared they are provided with feedback from a variety of methods including, “writing something positive and negative so I know what to work on next time,” “rubrics,” “comments on my paper that I need to add more things to my story because it is too short,” and “good job, next time be sure to transition a little bit clearer.” A grade 4 student also shared the feedback he receives “tells us what next year [we] are going to have to do, so try it now.”
- Staff participate in instructional power walks with a focus around a guiding question several times throughout the year. During the power walks staff collect low-inference notes and identify ideas for improvement, which may include lesson planning aspects to add or eliminate. During a recent power walk focused on student engagement, several staff members offered the instructing teacher ideas for improvement inclusive of: turn-and-talk is too long leading to some students losing interest while teacher talks to others, include the interactive white board in the lesson, call on students who do not seem engaged, and add a sticker incentive for not calling out, acting out vocabulary words, or conversation cubes. Another power walk focused on classroom organization and environment asked teachers to reflect on their peer’s classroom physical arrangement, organization, non-verbal communication of décor when entering and on the walls, and how the classrooms showcase student success do.
- Students often self and peer assess their work products using a checklist. Teachers also provide additional feedback for the students so they are aware of their next steps and what “I will try to do.” Teachers also write suggestions in student notebooks and margins of their assignments identifying next steps. Students stated their teachers “help us on Wednesday for the people who need extra help,” and “give us more resources” when they are not sure what to do next.