



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**J.H.S 123 James M. Kieran**

**Middle School X123**

**1025 Morrison Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10472**

**Principal: Richard Hallenbeck Jr.**

**Date of review: April 21, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

## The School Context

J.H.S. 123 James M. Kieran is a middle school with 345 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 21% Black, 77% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 23% English Language Learners and 30% 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 91.0%.

## 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>Developing</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 <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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Developing</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>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</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>Celebration</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<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 related to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations to families that are connected to a path to college and careers.

### Impact

Staff receives training and is held accountable for expectations communicated by the school's leadership. Families understand their children's progress toward the school's high expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations regarding increasing the quality of student writing and providing opportunities for making student thinking visible, with a focus on questioning and discussion. Observation feedback pushes teachers to implement practices aligned to these expectations with statements such as, "Create a system that ensures that you are calling on volunteers and non-volunteers evenly," and "Engage students in discussion by displaying student work via the document camera. By providing a visual that comes from the students, more students will want to engage in dialog."
- Agendas from staff meetings contain items such as Habits of Discussion, and Turn and Talk. Additionally, the staff handbook communicates the importance of writing folders and portfolios. The writing folders are used daily during the writing workshop period and are to include the appropriate rubrics as well as drafts of other pieces from the current unit of study. Writing portfolios are to consist of on demand and published work along with the appropriate rubrics.
- An online platform serves as a primary form of communication according to parents who said that they could go to the site to get updates on grades, assignment completion, attendance and events. For those who do not access the internet regularly, parents were clear that members of the school staff reach out to them regarding academic progress as well as other information pertaining to their children through texts, phone calls and in person conferencing.
- Parents spoke of workshops conducted by school staff that clearly outlined the high school application process. One parent said, "It helped me search with my daughter for high schools based on what she's interested in." Another noted that she and her child went to a couple of high school open houses that they would not have known about had it not been for the staff reaching out and encouraging them to go.
- When asked what they have learned from workshops conducted by school staff, a parent responded, "I learned a lot about what kind of math they are doing." Documents from such a session included rules for adding and subtracting integers.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Teachers are developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Adjustments to curricula and instruction to meet students' learning needs are inconsistently made across classrooms.

### Supporting Evidence

- Student progress in literacy is tracked over the course of the year. Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) scores and levels, English Language Arts (ELA) State test proficiency levels, running record Lexile levels as well as ELA course grades are all entered into a spreadsheet, providing staff with a clear picture of the various levels of student proficiency.
- Teachers stated that reading levels assessed during guided reading inform how students are grouped for various reading activities as well as the use of leveled texts provided during instruction. One such example is in a lesson on the octopus, which purposely provides as many as four different levels of the same informational content. A guided reading observation sheet listed the names of students in a class with their reading levels. Brackets drawn in by the teacher showed how she intended to group them during instruction. The degree to which staff tracks reading levels and groups students as an assessment practice is not consistently evident across subject areas. In addition, although leveled texts are evidence of curricular adjustments, it was not clear what instructional modifications are made for students given their varied ability levels.
- A few teachers were observed using checklists to monitor student performance during instruction. However, it was not a consistent practice across classrooms. In addition, effective adjustments during instruction based on checks for understanding varied. In an ELA class, the teacher modeled the annotation of imagery in a poem while conducting the workshop model, and although students complied as they copied her annotation, they were never asked to confirm their understanding of imagery before beginning group work. Similarly, whether it was the concept of natural selection in a science class, or perfect square in math, teachers did not consistently assess students' understanding of key concepts prior to asking them to engage in work based on those concepts.
- Students noted that they use rubrics often to assess their writing and checklists to assess the quality of other literacy tasks. They also showed checklists used in math to self-assess.

## Additional Findings

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

Curricula and academic tasks are in the process of being aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills. In addition, they do not always reflect planning that is informed by student data.

### Impact

A diversity of learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, do not always have access to curricula and tasks that are cognitively engaging across grades and subject areas.

### Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plans for three ELA classes: one grade 6 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT), one grade 7 and one grade 8, were virtually identical. The objective of all three lessons involved students annotating poems and making noticings about their structure and content. Although six Common Core Learning Standards were listed, not all were addressed in the learning activities, as designed. For example, although students were to identify the subject of the poem, only in one lesson plan were they required to determine the theme or analyze its development over the course of the text. Similarly, they were to note how the poems looked, but not analyze how the poems' form or structure contributed to their meaning. The differentiation section in all three plans were identical, making it unclear how the strategies listed would be purposefully used to cognitively engage the diversity of learners within the three different classrooms.
- A science lesson plan contained activities that ended with higher order reflection questions. One tasked students to make connections between the lab and Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection. Another question asked students to use the results of the activity to form a hypothesis. In addition, the lesson plan clearly outlined how students were to be grouped, the role of the Spanish language paraprofessional, and which groups would receive translated worksheets.
- In two math lesson plans reviewed, there were minimal references to instructional modifications for students with varying ability given the skills and content being taught. One plan noted an easy/medium worksheet, and a medium/hard worksheet. The other lesson plan stated that the teacher would continue work with students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and that other adults would work with small groups.
- A social studies plan provided students with the opportunity to analyze political cartoons and text, to discuss their observations and answer document-based questions. Strategies for differentiation included translation, when appropriate, and leveled reading materials.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, and student work products reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### **Impact**

There is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and a limited demonstration of higher order thinking in student work.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- In a math lesson, groups were expected to discuss various topics pertaining to the use of the Pythagorean Theorem. At one point the teacher asked, “Is five a perfect square?” At another point, the teacher tried to address a student misunderstanding by intentionally asking a question that had no answer, “What number times itself gives you seven?” In both instances as well as others, students were unable to engage the question. One student stated, “I don’t know what a perfect square is.”
- Approximately half of the students in a science class attempted the Do Now activity, which required a written response. Of those who did write answers, a number of them used incomplete sentences. A number of students were also not facile with connecting the lab activity to the larger scientific concept of natural selection. When asked why they were doing the lab, some noted that they were trying to figure out which kind of beak was better at picking up different types of food. When asked why that was important to understand, only a few were able to articulate how a bird’s ability to eat the available food affected the likelihood of its survival.
- A teacher used illustrations and political cartoons in a social studies class to support students’ understanding of a political movement. In analyzing an image, a student wrote, “In this picture, the signs show how alcohol can make people do strange things, like the man falling into the downward path. This supports prohibition.” Class discussion included analysis where students understood the rationale for and the impact of prohibition on American society.
- In an ELA class, the annotation process that was modeled focused on figurative language, setting, and imagery. However, there was no demonstration of what to do when students came across a word they did not know, which hindered some students’ ability to analyze the text. Students circled unknown words and wrote the definition next to it in the other two classes engaged in the same lesson.

<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. Distributive leadership structures are in place that provide teachers with a voice in key decisions.

**Impact**

Professional collaboration is strengthening teacher capacity and supporting the achievement of school goals. Teachers’ voice in school decisions affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- An observed teacher meeting began with a review of the previous week’s meeting minutes, followed by a review of the team’s problem of practice which pertained to providing students with opportunities to make their thinking visible. They then reviewed their instructional improvement process, which consists of eight steps that are grouped into the three phases: prepare, inquire and act. In looking at the annotation skills of three ELLs, teachers noted various strengths and weakness, cited wonderings and ended with listing next steps, which included modifying the annotation rubric, teaching the importance of text features, and identifying the central idea.
- Minutes from a science team meeting highlight the use of a surfacing the gap protocol used to look at student work. The meeting revealed that students had difficulty with connecting the claim, evidence and reasoning in scientific explanation. Suggestions to improve instruction included scaffolding the teaching of reasoning and implementing sentence starters and transitional words to link ideas.
- Notes from a social studies team meeting show a focus on how to infuse literacy strategies into history courses. The notes outlined reading codes that would inform annotation of text with a focus on details, central idea, and setting. Next steps included emphasizing these close reading strategies with leveled articles across social studies classes. Samples of articles annotated by students using the appropriate codes indicated an increase in student ability to identify important details and jot down the central ideas in the margins.
- Teachers identified a number of decisions that they have made that have had a positive impact on teaching and learning across the school. The instructional cabinet, which consists of representatives from all departments, developed the lesson plan templates intended to promote a coherent approach to planning. The cabinet also drafted the professional development calendar, which was approved by leadership. A teacher driven initiative led to teachers from the ELA department conducting collegial training sessions in other departments to support the use of annotation across all ELA, social studies and science classes.