



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**J.H.S. 145 Arturo Toscanini**

**Middle School X145**

**1000 Teller Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Lauren Wilkins**

**Date of review: March 9, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

## The School Context

J.H.S. 145 Arturo Toscanini is a middle school with 301 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 29% Black, 69% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 42% English Language Learners and 26% students with disabilities. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 88.6%.

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

## Area of Celebration

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

School leaders are beginning to communicate high expectations for instruction and other elements of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to the entire staff. The school is developing systems to provide feedback to families regarding student progress.

### Impact

School leaders are developing a system for teacher accountability and beginning to ensure that parents understand expectations towards career and college readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have provided teachers in the school with training in the Teachers College curriculum and Teaching Matters. There has also been school-based professional development on learning styles, learning targets and some preliminary work on vocabulary development for English Language Learners (ELLs). However, imprints of this work were not seen consistently in use across classrooms. Although asked, teachers in teacher teams did not express a connection between the professional development and their instructional practices.
- At teachers' request, school leaders have supported teachers in the development of a suggested lesson-planning template to support the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* component 1E, designing coherent instruction. The use of planning following the template was observed in one class.
- The school leaders' focus on cognitive engagement was observed in the many school-created posters in each classroom listing sentence frames for higher-order questions and in feedback to teachers using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Feedback from an observation states, "The questions you pose are of low cognitive challenge with single correct responses and were asked in rapid succession." In another observation, feedback stated, "Have students create, answer, and discuss higher-order thinking questions within their groups before calling on individual students to respond" and "Please allow wait time for student to comprehend the question and formulate their answers and include more higher-order question stems."
- In a parent meeting, parents stated that the new administration is focused on academics and they are now more aware of student progress. They stated that they receive information on student grades and are aware of when students are falling behind. They stated that their students are still struggling in school and they do not know how to best support struggling students with their next steps, except to ask the school for afterschool support. When asked about how students use rubrics, parents stated that they did not know what rubrics were and that they had never seen them.

## Area of Focus

<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 and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Impact

Teaching scaffolds do not always support students' cognitive engagement in appropriately challenging tasks. Some activities limit productive struggle and students' ability to evenly demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work products and discussion.

### Supporting Evidence

- In one math class, the teacher invited students to the board to demonstrate their thinking. He had students define math terms for clarity, asked clarifying questions that led to self-corrections. Students were also partnered as a support. This was not the case in other classrooms.
- In a grade six social studies lesson, students had to answer the question "Is Hamilton's idea sensible?" Students were asked to use their notes from previous lessons along with the textbook to answer the question. In conversation with students, they did not understand that Hamilton was setting up the first national bank in the colonies to repay foreign debt. Students struggled with the task and there were many blank pages. At one table, ELLs stated they could not read the text. When asked to read aloud, these students struggled with fluency and expression and did not receive support to pronounce vocabulary words like colonist and citizens. Across tables, students lacked the notes needed to the answer the question. No scaffolds other than a dictionary were observed.
- In a grade seven English class, students were involved in station learning. The essential question was "Does taking a stand have to be something done on a grand scale, or can it be something simple and small?" The teacher had set up thematically related tables and students rotated to each table. At the first table, student had a quote from Albert Einstein about evil being those who look on and do nothing. Students struggled to interpret the quote. One student stated that the Germans were evil and they scared Schindler who was keeping a list. One student began to share that this quote could mean that people could have done something, when the teacher came back to the group and stopped the conversation with a series of rapid fire low level questions such as "What are we studying? What do we know about the Germans?" and "What were some of the evil things that they did?" This hindered the opportunity for students to think about the meaning and application of the quote.
- A review of student work products revealed that students write only a few paragraphs and all of them are in simple sentences with little variation. Few essays were observed. Most of the writing students produce is filling in answers on worksheets.

## Additional Findings

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

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core or content standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits.

### Impact

Some unit and lesson plans incorporate the shifts but not all of them have tasks that meet the needs of ELLs and students with disabilities.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses *EngageNY* and *Eureka Math* as the math curriculum. A review of the grade eight module on linear equations demonstrates that students learn to apply symbolic notations and properties of inequalities learned in grade six and seven. In this unit, students write, solve, and graph linear equations with one and two variables. There is not yet one articulated curriculum and approach to ensure that all students on the same grade level work on the same standards.
- A review of lesson plans reveals that some incorporate rigorous tasks. For example, an interdisciplinary unit on Nazi Germany has students read, annotate, and compare both literature and primary documents to answer the essential question concerning whether people should take a political stand or be a bystander. In a science lesson plan, students have to use their knowledge of the role of meiosis and abnormality in cell division to write an essay explaining cancer and heredity abnormality such as sickle cell disease. However, another unit on the Civil Rights Movement only required students to recall and restate the main idea.
- A review of curriculum notes in unit maps reveals that some teachers make purposeful decisions in pacing their curriculum to ensure that students are prepared for the State assessments. For example, in October, teachers and an outside consultant looked at their math modules. They noticed that the *EngageNY* modules for grade six had 29 lessons that they would not complete until mid-November. Similarly, the second module in grade eight had 40 lesson on one major strand. The school had to prioritize lessons based on the standards that are most heavily weighted on the State exam. For example, in grade six, the school prioritized the standard that focuses on ratios and proportions.

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

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula. The school is developing their use of common assessments.

### Impact

Misaligned assessment practices limit actionable feedback to students and the school's ability to determine progress towards goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Some of the rubrics used for feedback to students are scoring rubrics for State exams and are not meant to provide student feedback. These scoring rubrics in math and science read as follows, "Demonstrates a thorough understanding of mathematical concepts," or "Indicates that the student has demonstrated only partial understanding." Using this scoring rubric as a student rubric has yielded the following teacher feedback to students "You answered most of the question correctly. Your assignment was mostly correct. Good work, keep the mathematical concepts up for proportion." This feedback is not actionable for students and limits their understanding of where and how to improve.
- While the school has many rubrics, few standards-based rubrics were observed in use. Bulletin boards displayed student work with a three-point scoring rubric meant for teacher use and not for student feedback. This scoring rubric has language such as "student demonstrates a partial understanding of mathematical concepts and procedure of task" and lacked meaningful feedback for students. Some student work was observed that had been scored with a Teachers College Narrative Writing rubric. Most classrooms display a notebook rubric and classwork-behavior rubrics, though they were not seen in use.
- Most student work in classrooms has teacher feedback; however, this feedback is not always aligned to a rubric or criteria chart. Teacher feedback in most of the classrooms visited was comprised of observations, reminders or encouragement and yielded few actionable next steps for students to use to improve their work or progress towards mastery. Some of the comments across subjects were, "Nice work! I like how you took the time to solve this concept" or "what strategy do you use to determine the point of view?"
- Teachers administered common assessments in the fall and at mid-year to measure change in performance. The school realized that their fall assessment was not aligned to the standards so they hired a consultant to help them develop an assessment that is more aligned with the standards. The school created mid-year assessments from previous New York State Common Core Assessments. Since both the fall and mid-year assessment were not aligned with each other, there was not a reliable comparison from which to measure student progress.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on teams that are ineffectively connected to school goals. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share.

### Impact

While the school has many inquiry teams, they are still developing the process of inquiry with student work. There is little positive impact on teacher practice or progress towards goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in large content area teacher groups for two consecutive periods once a week. For example, one meeting had all grade six, seven and eight math teachers meeting together. The teachers write their focus question on a chart and then break out into grade level meetings in the same room. They work as a grade team and come back to a large group share out to look for similarities across the grades. The following was charted at the beginning of a teacher meeting: grade six requested to change the curriculum to expose students to expressions and equations earlier in the year; grade seven requested that students be exposed to more multiple representation of the skill; and grade eight requested more time for ratio and proportion. However, the focus at each group was not on their charted question, but on their struggle with ELLs and the need for more scaffolds for supporting these students.
- During the inquiry teacher meeting, most of the teachers talked in broad and general terms about what students did not know. They collaboratively generated long lists of concepts and skills that students did not know. They listed such items as multiplicative inverse and dependent and independent variable. In one grade level team, only one teacher went back to the student work to see what students could do and where they needed support. This teacher stated, "I can see that where students had problems with this one word problem. Students knew the cost per pound, but had to buy one and a half pounds of the item." The teacher went on to say that students generally did not buy one and a half pounds of something, and so this example "threw them off." He then stated that he knew that if the problem were presented as an equation, students would be able to do the math.
- In one teacher team meeting, teachers stated that they spent a great deal of time trying to remediate for students who come in with low skills. They stated that they spent their time chunking things and breaking things down into the lowest components. They stated that their biggest struggle was teaching ELLs because they did not have the strategies needed to differentiate for these students. Teachers stated that this group of students was lagging behind. The team stated that they wanted more professional development and support in developing appropriate scaffolds for ELLs. They added that while the school has some English as a New Language teachers, they were mostly involved in testing for the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT).