



Quality Review Report

2015-2016

I.S. 219 New Venture School

Middle School X219

**3630 Third Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Dominic Cipollone

**Date of review: March 11, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

I.S. 219 New Venture School is a middle school with 333 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 37% Black, 61% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 30% English Language Learners and 28% students with disabilities. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 89.6%.

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	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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	Developing
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	Proficient
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	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness to families.

Impact

As a result, there is a culture of high expectations that supports teachers in meeting goals and families in understanding student progress towards meeting expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's instructional focus is on strengthening writing and classroom discussion through the use of argument. This focus is communicated to the entire staff through weekly staff meetings, newsletters and emails. The principal also holds individual mid-year data checkpoint conversation to ensure that each teacher's work aligns to both schoolwide expectations and school goals. Teachers are asked to identify students at level one performance and to "provide evidence of how you are impacting students at this level." Teachers are held accountable to providing students with extra supports, collecting samples of students work and frequently monitoring student progress.
- To support the school focus on strengthening writing, teachers are provided with professional development through the literacy coach and also at Teachers College. At the school, teachers receive professional development on unpacking the Teachers College writing units. Teachers also receive professional development on Junior Great Books and particularly how to cultivate inquiry discussions which are closely aligned to Socratic Seminars. A review of teacher evaluations and feedback data from formal and informal observations and walkthroughs, demonstrated that teachers are guided to refine their practice in strengthening writing and improving the quality of class discussion.
- Parents are aware of student progress through the use of PupilPath. One parent took out her smartphone to display her PupilPath account and proudly showed how her child went from scores in the 60s to scores in the 90s. Another parent stated that she used PupilPath as an email system to communicate with teachers. Parents stated that they have participated in workshops that allow them to experience the curriculum and the school's new approach, which is STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics). In the winter, the school had a STEAM science fair where parents learned about scientific method by engaging in the experiments themselves. Parents completed exit tickets at the end of the fair and a review of these shows parents were challenged by participating in the experiments and want to see "more presentation of student projects."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula and feedback is not always rubric-based or actionable. Teachers inconsistently use ongoing checks for understanding or student self-assessment.

Impact

As a result, feedback to teachers and students hinders a clear vision of student achievement and assessment practices do not yet consistently lead to effective adjustments to meet student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Student work from common assessments displayed Teachers College writing rubrics and rubric-aligned feedback; however, a good deal of classroom teacher feedback consists of "grows and glows" which offer student encouragement, but not next steps. For example, a review of work during the student meetings displayed feedback such as "Good job," "Keep up the good work," and "Try harder" or even "Pay Attention." In one class, students had the same next step on all English essays, "Your introduction needs to preview the subject of your paper and your words and phrases need to linger in the reader's mind." Such feedback is not actionable and does not provide concrete next steps towards mastery.
- Across classrooms, students did not have checklists detailing steps for completing the task or criteria in their work. In some classes, rubrics were observed taped to the desk but were not observed in use except for one classroom. In this class, students could not speak about what the rubric assessed or how to use it.
- As part of the school's assessment practice in student self-assessment, all classrooms have student-maintained portfolio binders. The portfolio is meant to house student work across all subjects with teacher feedback. A table of contents allows students to fill in the task and the rubric score. A review of these portfolios showed that practices varied greatly from class to class. Some portfolios had a solid collection of student work, others had a few pieces. Teacher feedback was uneven, as in the case of English Language Learners' (ELLs) portfolios, which had the least teacher feedback and focused on praise rather than clear next steps.
- Teachers were observed tracking student data in only three out of seven classrooms. These trackers ranged greatly in how precise or specific the item being measured was. One tracked elaboration and craft, while another was a piece of paper with only student names and checks next to them.
- Across classrooms, checks for understanding required students to agree or disagree by using thumbs up or thumb down. This allowed teachers to gauge consensus but it did not allow teachers to probe understanding of skills or concepts. Furthermore, this practice does not allow students to explain or justify their thinking so that misconceptions could be surfaced and addressed and does not allow for self- or peer-assessments.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, content standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits.

Impact

Students participate in a Common Core-aligned curriculum with rigorous tasks that promote career and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- In order to support the school goal of strengthening student writing and engaging students in evidenced-based classroom discussions, the school has added Teachers College writing units and Junior Great Books to the regular *Code X* curriculum. The school follows the New York City social studies and science sequence and pacing calendars.
- A review of a teacher-created module for grade 8 shows alignment between two math curricula. This module blends a lesson from *GO Math!* on representing linear non-proportional relationships with a lesson from *EngageNY* on linear equations in two variables. This unit was a collaboration of the teacher team with the new math coach.
- A review of lessons across grades and content areas revealed that the lessons reflect the standards and instructional shifts. Students are required to annotate text, and highlight and make notes to prepare for text-based discussions. Academic vocabulary is emphasized in instruction and students are held accountable for using it. In math, students see multiple representations and are required to show all their work and include various strategies for solving the problems.
- Science tasks at the school, like the paper towel absorption lab, ask students to “design an experimental investigation” and to “identify the variables to be evaluated.” Students need to provide information for the dependent and independent variables, develop a hypothesis, and record data, draw conclusions, and then write a lab report including tables, graphs, and charts. Tasks in science also include students writing research papers. Research topics in the science unit on cells included students writing a research paper that demonstrated their knowledge of how abnormal cell division could result in cancer or in genetic mutations such as sickle cell and diabetes. Students are asked to write “a statement of what you understand or conclusion that you have researched from an investigation or set of investigations, and to provide the data sets from these investigations.” Students must display scientific knowledge about how things work and discuss findings with others.
- In a grade 6 Junior Great Book unit, students read a historical fiction excerpt called *Shackleton’s Stowaway*, and highlight and annotate the text to select a piece of evidence supporting their viewpoint. Students are also required to write a short response identifying the central ideas using two details from the text.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

While most classroom practices reflect the school belief of empowering students to demonstrate active knowledge and understanding through the use of academic vocabulary in text-based writing and discussion, this was not observed across all classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- The school belief of having students explain their thinking using academic vocabulary was observed across classrooms. For example, in a grade 8 class, students engaged in a lesson about tables, graphs, and equations are used to express math concepts. The teacher asked students to look at a series of functions and to explain if the expression as written met the criteria for a function. Students raised their hands and justified their answers. One student stated that the expression was not a function because it did not meet the definition as there was not a one-to-one correspondence between the sets of inputs and the outputs. Students then worked on solving math functions and generated coordinates that they graphed on a line. The teacher intentionally showed students the relationship between the equation and the graph and made connection to functions. This was not the case in an Integrated Co-Teaching math class set up as four distinct math stations, where students sat in groups with minimal engagement, working on basic math tasks such as placing numbers in ordinal order or playing the board game, Battleship. While the game is based on the idea of coordinates and graphing, when questioned, students could not explain the connection between the game and the mathematical concepts.
- High levels of student of discussion and participation was observed across most classrooms although the quality of the discussion varied from class to class. In some classes students participated in turn and talks that generated or expanded content information such as in a grade 6 math class where the students discussed with a partner how to use the order of operations in math, and a grade 6 literature class where students engaged in accountable talk to discuss ideas. In this literature class, students participated in shared inquiry discussions, which is the school's version of Socratic Seminar. In this grade 6 class, students used accountable talk to discuss a historical fiction novel based on the events on the ship *Endurance* during its polar exploration of the Antarctic. Students cited page, paragraph and line as text-based evidence for their interpretation as to whether Sir Ernest Shackleton or Officer Wilde was the most effective leader and why.
- In a grade 8 science class, the teacher created stations where students worked in different groups related to abnormal cell division. One group worked on explaining cell division, another group on abnormal cells and cancer, and another on cell division and plants. Students used academic vocabulary such as "mitosis," "cytoplasm" and "chromosomes" to explain that cellular death happens daily. When asked why living things don't die as a result of cellular death, students were able to explain that through cellular division, new cells grow daily in youth, causing the body to reach a balance between cellular death and regeneration. However, in old age, cells do not duplicate quickly enough to achieve balance between death and regeneration.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals. Distributed leadership structures for building teacher capacity are in place.

Impact

Teacher teams use an inquiry approach to examine class and common assessment data to promote school goals. Distributive leadership practices ensure that have a voice in key decisions affecting students.

Supporting Evidence

- In one teacher team meeting, teachers had clear roles and used a protocol to look at student work. In this meeting, teachers graded essays from the latest common assessment while norming the use of the State rubric. One teacher stated, “I don’t see anything in this student work. I think he is getting a zero.” This opened up a conversation what the rubric was assessing and how the student work aligned to the criteria. The school coach used the opportunity to norm the team’s understanding of assessing student work. The team then used their new understanding of student work to plan lessons with scaffolds that would ensure that students would be able to demonstrate the criteria expected in the State rubric.
- Teachers stated that one of the inquiry teacher team meeting that has strengthened their instructional capacity as been unpacking the Teachers College writing units. The teachers stated that they have been engaged in writing teaching points, creating lessons and gathering materials that would provide scaffolds to support struggling students. Teachers stated that this has changed their practice because it has created an opportunity to understand the instructional shifts to support the Common Core Learning Standards. They added that in gathering supplemental material to use as scaffolds, they have become aware of sequencing ideas so that lessons are more developmental to avoid errors or misconceptions that require unnecessary supportive scaffolds.
- Teachers shared that supporting quality class discussions is one of the school goals that they have helped shape through the school’s distributive leadership structures. As school leaders adopted the Teachers College writing units, teachers felt that they needed a supplemental program that would provide them with additional literature and would support Socratic seminar. The teachers suggested Junior Great Books and it was adopted school wide. These curricula required professional development and teachers shared that they had opportunities to attend the professional development that they felt best supported their needs. As teachers worked to develop and to align teaching points between the two programs, they requested more common meetings and a school literacy coach to help support their work and lead a model Socratic Seminar classes. School administration was to provide teachers with the support and materials that they requested to ensure that teachers would be able to design quality units that supported writing and class discussions.