



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Grant Avenue Elementary School

Elementary School X449

**250 East 164 Street
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Kristin Erat

**Date of review: March 15, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

The School Context

Grant Avenue Elementary is an elementary school with 462 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 5% Asian, 30% Black, 62% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 22% English Language Learners and 25% 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 93.1%.

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	Area of 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	Additional Findings	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	Area of Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

4.2 Teacher Teams

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

All teachers are engaged in collaborative inquiry-based professional development teams. Distributive leadership structures afford teachers and teams the opportunity to make key decisions about teaching and learning through the analysis and revision of curriculum and student work.

Impact

The work, frequency, and variety of teacher teams provide all teachers with opportunities to engage in shared leadership and professional collaboration resulting in improved teacher capacity and student mastery of goals across the school community.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers meet multiple times weekly in different team meetings, including professional learning team (PLT) and grade teams. Teachers stated, “Through these meetings we help each other grow professionally and daily [share] ideas in a nonthreatening arena to help move our kids, [align curricula], without egos.” Teams use protocols and share their focus on curricula development and revisions based on student data and work. A vast majority of teachers agreed that lesson study has led to their professional growth and improved student achievement, as teachers’ demonstrated growth in several areas to date including reading levels. Teachers implement a “reading cycle planner,” whereby teachers design the inquiry question to address students’ needs for those who are not meeting benchmark-reading levels. A teacher stated that after analyzing benchmark levels, they “identify skills students need to read independently at those levels, design [instructional] strategies and classroom structures, and determine where in next reading unit teaching points may need to be revised for the whole class and small groups to differentiate for students’ learning, particularly English as a New Language (ENL) and students with disabilities.”
- The implementation of the school wide reading comprehension plan has teachers using a reading level tracker across grades. A second grade teacher shared her reading level tracker, demonstrating that, “2 of the 6 targeted students have reached grade level benchmarks, and the other 4 continue to meet with the teacher twice weekly in small group instruction for guided reading strategy groups.” The ENL teacher, who stays in communication and alignment during team meetings, uses a common text “to assist in finding reading strategies to create student-friendly goals for their targeted group of students.” Teachers track their targeted students’ progress and share this at the team meetings and also share best practices for both math and literacy. Teachers also focus on “guided math and stations to provide students with multiple opportunities and entry points to math Common Core Learning Standards.” Vertically, teachers conduct several mini-course simulations across grades. Teachers conducted a math mini-course across grades 3-5 using their targeted students as case studies to determine patterns and school wide commitment across grades 1-5. A new teacher stated and others agreed, “Team meetings are reflective of mentors, colleagues, and a responsive team where I can ask for help.”
- Embedded distributive leadership has grade leaders and coaches meet bi-weekly with administration to focus on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and in a vertical planning leadership study group. Teachers rotate facilitating teacher team meetings, “name the [inquiry cycle focus], design the flow of sessions, and hold one another accountable for revising instruction.” Administration supports staff to make key data-based decisions.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Although teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, across a vast majority of classes, they do not yet strategically provide high-quality supports and extensions for all student work products and discussions.

Impact

The engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products, including the work of English Language Learners and students with disabilities does not yet reflect high levels of student, thinking, discussion, and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that the staff's school wide instructional focus last year was "to work on making students' thinking more visible and concrete by backing up their thinking with evidence, onto which is layered more strategic practices in differentiating instruction to support all learners." In addition, the staff focuses upon engaging students in learning using the Danielson *Framework for Learning*. Additionally, the staff partners with City Year, who provides 10 volunteers daily to work with students in the classroom. In a grade 2 math class, student experts led groups of students through a review of solving test questions they had incorrect. Not all students were accurate in their "peer checks" showing they were not always able to demonstrate what they had learned.
- Multiple entry points are evident across classes but high-quality supports and extensions are not yet strategically provided across the vast majority of classes. In one grade 2/3 bridge special education class, student pairs worked on matching their voices with the feeling or mood of the character in a book by acting out the characters' words. After this exercise, students read leveled texts independently and in groups looking for character analysis with adults facilitating their learning. Further, no extension was provided for the "high flyer" nor did the text provide students with a clear model of character analysis. Additionally, in a grade 5 Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) math lesson, although students worked in parallel groups employing a problem-solving strategy and engaged in differentiated learning, not all had the opportunity to be engaged. One group had tiered-tasks they solved after the teacher briefly reviewed the model. Yet, the second group of students listened to the teacher model for the time of the visit, while they sat with neither anything in hand nor the opportunity to discuss their thoughts, while a third group, ready for the next step, worked with a City Year tutor who dominated a discussion about a measurement conversion table as the extension.
- Student discussion is built into the lessons, but not all students own the discussions. In some classes, students first worked alone and then shared their ideas. In a grade 3 math class during the model section, the teacher demonstrated how to use a table to solve problems using four scaffolded questions. The students had multiple opportunities to share their ideas on how to use the questions to answer the problem, demonstrating their thinking. Using ample wait-time when posing questions, the teacher gave students the opportunity to think, visualize, pair-share, and share whole class. On the other hand, in a grade 5 ICT writing class, although students had multiple entry points into the "power word" and the reading, adult voices dominated discussion. A small group of students worked with a teacher, with some answering teacher-directed questions, but not all students were engaged, thus missing opportunities for all to own the discussion.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty adopted selected curricula to ensure that they are providing instruction aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and using student data to plan and refine rigorous academic tasks.

Impact

The adoption and refinement of curricula enables school wide coherence and college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks provide opportunities for all students to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration shared that they and staff collaboratively adjust the Common Core-aligned adopted materials such as *Teachers College Reading and Writing Program* (TCRWP) and *GO Math!* to meet their students' needs since 22% are English Language Learners (ELLs) and 25% are students with disabilities. For example, staff discerned the need based on data, and adjusted certain math sections in *GO Math!* that did not have enough opportunities for students, the principal explained, "to move from concrete representations using manipulatives to represent the abstract before moving toward the more rigorous activities, especially in upper grades and in addressing multiple-step word problems with a heavy emphasis on visualization and making the problem real." To that end, staff has since incorporated more opportunities for use of manipulatives, visualization, and then a gradual release of these scaffolds. Additionally, the staff used data to determine another curricular need, to increase the exposure to non-fiction. As a result, staff has doubled the non-fiction units of study to create a balance between fiction and non-fiction.
- Staff has incorporated science and social studies into reading and writing units so that these purposeful and data-determined decisions build coherence across grades. Staff also uses an intervention program to support students who are below benchmark to accelerate. For instance, *Explode the Code* is a targeted intervention program that is Common Core-aligned for struggling students who have issues reading, especially with phonics, blends, diagraphs, phonemic awareness and then targets skills for them to work on and helps to bring them up to fill the learning gaps.
- A review of curriculum maps and lesson plans indicated that teachers have planned the curriculum overview that maps out the year for all subjects by grade. From this global viewpoint, the staff then maps the units to include focused skills and strategies and modifications for students with disabilities and ELLs to ensure that all students have access to these curricula that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards. A review of lesson plans indicates that across the school an agreed-upon format arranged in the workshop model, aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, These are timed to include a connection, model, guided practice with active engagement, independent practice with delineated planned instructional groups and types of grouping, and end with reflection and assessment. Differentiated and scaffolded lessons provide access for all students. Also evident in curriculum maps, units plans, and lesson plans is that teachers have developed assessments, rubrics and scaffolds. Further evident are lesson revisions based on student work and data to support re-teaching.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across the school, common assessments are utilized to identify student progress and adjust instruction. Teachers use school-wide rubrics to provide feedback to students with actionable next steps.

Impact

Teachers are grouping students based on learning needs and assessment data, and assessment results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration and staff have determined the common assessments used to create data-determined student groups in classes consistently across the school. Students know they are in groups that are based on previous assessments, including the running records from *TCRWP*, and also know that these groups are flexible, changing according to these and other data results. Students know their reading levels and strategies to be used to reach their reading goals. For example, a student stated, “My goal is Q and my [reading] strategy is to stop and jot notes about what I’m reading,” and another stated, “My goal is level U and my reading strategy to jot down [notes] on post-its about characters to remember information.”
- Across grades, student work receives a rubric score and actionable feedback and next steps on how to improve areas of growth that are rooted in the language of the rubric. Students stated, “We use rubrics so that we can understand what to work on and what we are already doing well plus goals and things that we are already good at.” Another added, “Whenever we are working we look at the 4 on the rubric and keeping to try to write or include what it tells you.” Also students use checklists to ensure that they have included all the criteria required by the task. One student stated and others agreed, “If you didn’t do it you don’t check it off—be honest—but you don’t leave it like that or you will get a 1 and you need 3 or 4. You go back and add what is missing.” Students also were able to explain the feedback that teachers provide and were able to demonstrate how they used the feedback to improve the next assignment. For example, “My next steps are to make sure I’m supporting connected text because my details didn’t match with what I was saying, so I’m going to tell my partner my writing plan because it is easier to talk about it first to make sense.”
- Teachers across grades use common assessments and have created a school wide assessment calendar per subject and grade to demonstrate student growth for both math and literacy. To create a focal point, administration requested that all classroom teachers target “six students to carefully focus upon those students to ensure that they are on track to move them to benchmark, and this tracking system has resulted in 89 of the 163 targeted students, or 55% on-track to meeting grade level.” Teachers use reading level trackers and math trackers to follow their targeted students and to create small group instructional sessions three times a week in which to focus on next instructional steps. This also leads to adjustments in curricular and instructional decisions, whereby they regroup students to re-teach skills in mini-lessons that the data show as gaps in student achievement.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness are communicated by staff and school leaders as they partner with parents.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability to support student progress toward these high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration provides consistent communication to all staff regarding high expectations through the use of weekly memos called the *Educator’s Newsletter*, which includes celebrations and shout-outs, highlights of events, clear expectations for implementation of *TCRWP* cycles, data gathering and analysis and representative pictures of students during activities. Additionally, administration provides a staff handbook and professional development. Teachers and teacher leaders conducted a survey to determine, create, and present the professional development, including the Learning Partners Program, where they focus on meeting the needs of their students using differentiated and rigorous instruction. The professional development plan, which was rolled out during the summer three-day retreat, is built around five school wide goals including student engagement, differentiated instruction, strong collegial networks, deep inquiry work, and partnering with families. School leaders utilize a consistent cycle of observation providing actionable feedback, which then allows for continual updates of the professional development plan, to support staff’s implementation of these expectations.
- Parents all agreed that the teachers consistently communicate with them regarding their children’s progress toward the school’s high expectations. Parents spoke highly of Family Fridays, where parents are invited into classrooms, where they feel welcomed and supported in collaborating to meet the children’s needs. Additionally, parents stated that communications include emails, texts, phone calls, backpacked letters, monthly grade-team newsletters, and notifications through *Class Dojo*, an online program. Parents stated that the communication method did not matter, but that they had open access to their children’s teachers through multiple methods. One parent stated and others agreed, “This is a community school—we work together to support student growth.” Through the monthly grade-team newsletters, parents stated they are able to support their children’s learning as they partner with the school.
- The guidance counselor and a teacher of students with disabilities team up to provide workshops for families to help them understand the middle school selection and application process. Parents discussed attending middle school open houses and fairs and stated, “These workshops have been helpful for us to choose a school that is best for our children.” Sharing their excitement upon receiving notification of acceptance into their middle schools of choice, students explained that the counselor and teacher helped their families select the best schools for them. They shared that they attended open houses, learned about different schools, and returned to school for further support in narrowing their choices. Students also spoke about career day. Parents spoke about other workshops to support their understanding and partnership with staff and administration in supporting their children’s success. The kindergarten teachers conducted a workshop to spotlight reading tips.