



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**The Matilda Avenue School**

**Elementary School X483**

**4520 Matilda Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10470**

**Principal: Maria Cioffi**

**Date of review: April 21, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Buffie Simmons**

## The School Context

The Matilda Avenue School is an elementary school with 43 students in grade kindergarten. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 0% Asian, 51% Black, 28% Hispanic, and 16% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 2% students with disabilities. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 is not available due to new school status.

## 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>Well Developed</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>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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

All staff members collaborate on structured teams, strategically analyze and revise curricula. School leaders and teachers have nurtured an environment whereby professional collaborations remain focused on improved teacher pedagogy, shared leadership and advancing student achievement.

### Impact

As a result, there is coherence across subjects, continuous improvement in pedagogy, and effective integration of the instructional shifts and Common Core Learning Standards, ensuring increased achievement and mastery by all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- To build teacher capacity and support teacher teams in data-driven inquiry work, the school provides opportunities for all teachers to meet daily. In grade-level teams, teachers plan utilizing a common planning debrief form that includes a focused agenda, captures next steps, and outlines a timeline for the work to be completed. Follow-up meetings begin with a discussion of next steps from the prior meeting, resulting in modifications to mapping and lesson delivery. In addition to the instructional team, the horizontal team doubles as a child study team. The purpose of this team is to create action plans for struggling students, which includes an action plan and follow-ups to ensure the proper supports are implemented.
- Teachers, thus far, have completed three full cycles of inquiry focusing on letter sounds, subtraction, and informational writing. Teachers targeted students who scored 60% or below for the inquiry of letter sounds. Teachers thoughtfully developed a theory of action and guiding questions to structure their inquiry. The teachers' theory of action was to provide additional explicit instruction and guided practice using a double dose of *Foundations*, so that students would be able to identify all letters and sounds previously taught. Through deliberate analysis, the teachers found that 75% of their students were able to achieve 80% or higher in the area of identifying the sounds of letters taught. Only 4 out of the 16 students did not achieve 80% proficiency with two students scoring 76%. Teachers increased their instructional capacity by reflecting on student learning, the quality of instruction, and the implications for change in respective classrooms and the school. During the interview, the teachers stated that they realized their students learn best when using the strategy of drawing pictures. Teachers also discovered that using the mini-lesson led to more organized and targeted lessons.
- Across subjects, all content curriculum maps are living documents that are regularly revised during focused professional collaboration and shared schoolwide to elicit feedback and to build coherence across grades and subjects. Coherence is built through collaborating and sharing strategies. For example, in the subtraction inquiry cycle teachers shared that departmentalizing worked well with their students and adjusted the subtraction unit to allow for more time on each strategy. For writing, teachers created more scaffolds for students to encourage writing, such as draw a picture and then write.

## Area of Focus

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

Teachers' instructional strategies provide all learners with multiple entry points into the curricula so that students demonstrate high levels of thinking and discussion. However, in some cases there are missed opportunities for extensions and student ownership of learning.

### Impact

Across classrooms, students are challenged to engage in rigorous tasks that promote higher-order thinking. However, in some classrooms visited, ownership of learning was not actualized and lack of supports or extensions prevented consistent engagement of all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers used supports, such as chart paper, strategies card, manipulatives, and a beach ball to engage students and support learning. One teacher used a document reader in order to model writing in complete sentences. During classroom visits, supports for high-level discussions were identified in all classrooms. For example, there was evidence of sentence starters and prompts to support student to student discussions. In some classrooms there was also evidence of teachers encouraging students to explain their thinking. Additionally, teachers insisted on students using domain specific vocabulary, such as the term sphere in a math class.
- Across the classrooms visited, students were observed engaging in discussions that promoted participation and student to student interactions. In a math class, students participated in class discussions by responding to the teacher's questions after showing the class a cube. Students were asked to explore different shapes in a bag. The teacher asked the students to close their eyes and draw shapes from the bag. Afterwards, the shapes the child drew were sorted into two groups, a cube or not a cube. Students shared their noticing of their respective shape with each other and then they shared as a group. One student stated, "I noticed that my cube looks like a box." In another class, with the same lesson, students were given their shapes. Students focused on shapes that they wanted and on classmates' shapes without guidelines. As a result, some students were not engaged in the lesson and students were not afforded the opportunity to be purposeful with their selection choice.
- Across classrooms, students were provided with opportunities to think independently and work in groups to create meaning. However, in a literacy lesson, students looked for sight words but were underlining many words without any specificity. Additionally, a student observed was finished early, had already mastered the material and waited for the next activity without extensions. In another literacy lesson observed, teachers conferred with students while the remainder of the class worked in reading groups to retell their story, discuss sight words and describe pictures from their book.

## Additional Findings

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

A variety of precise and thorough feedback to students promotes a reflective culture focused on progress for all students. Pre- and post-assessment data, checklists, and benchmarking cycles determine student groupings and provide a clear portrait of student mastery.

### Impact

Ongoing collection and strategic use of formative and summative assessment data across classrooms has resulted in concise tracking of student progress, prescriptive next steps, and effective instructional adjustments at teacher team and classroom levels, leading to increased mastery for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- In reading, students are assessed formally four times a year through benchmarking cycles using *Fountas and Pinnell* to measure progress toward grade level reading standards. Running records are also utilized between these cycles to monitor progress and challenge students who are ready to move to the next level. Summative assessments are given at the end of each unit to determine growth toward meeting the grade level standards and pre-determined benchmarks. Curriculum is revised based on assessment data. All sets of data inform small group work as well as grouping of students during the workshop model. Consequently, the most recent data analysis suggests that over 80% of kindergarten students have advanced at least two reading levels since the beginning of the school year.
- Across classrooms, flexible writing groups are formed utilizing pre-assessment data according to skills and strategies specific to the targeted writing genre. Unit checklists assess writing behaviors, as do student work folders which are further analyzed by teams of teachers to assess progress and mastery. Students receive a checklist reinforcing sentence structure, adding picture details, handwriting neatness, punctuation and making sure the sentence make sense. Additionally, students reflect on their writing samples. "I'm proud of it because I colored it in nicely and I labeled penguin and water." To scaffold assessment practices for kindergarten students, teachers focus on a goal from a developmentally appropriate writing checklist which is unpacked for individual and groups of students based on their needs. In addition, students conference with teachers to identify goals and receive specific feedback to ensure movement toward mastery.
- The school developed a spreadsheet to enter data from literacy and math assessments in order to monitor the progress of individual students and identify trends and patterns among different subgroups. The school leader also tracks students based on those who entered kindergarten with prior pre-kindergarten experience. This system allows the school to look at the data for individual and groups of students, and the information gathered in the analysis of this data is utilized for planning instruction and to adjust the curricula to meet the individual learning needs of the students. For example, in reviewing the fall data from *Fountas and Pinnell*, the school found that the students were lacking spelling, punctuation, and capitalization knowledge. Instruction was adjusted to target students and increase support via small group and guided instruction. Phonics, labeling, stretching out words, integrating sight words, punctuation letter formation and capitalization were added with frequency to the curriculum across subjects to support students.

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

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

### Impact

The communication of high expectations has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability with staff. Feedback to families supports progress towards those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders support teachers in the creation and modification of unit plans through weekly team meetings. The faculty instructional handbook outlines expectations for classroom instruction and behavioral expectations. School leaders review this manual with the entire faculty. In addition, administrator and teachers discuss high expectations during the individual planning conferences. School leaders conduct observations followed by post-observation meetings and provide specific feedback with the stated expectation that the feedback will be put into action and seen during follow-up observations. The professional development plan is also driven by professional goals set by teachers and monitored throughout the year through benchmark conversations that are memorialized and reflected upon. Leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teachers are engaged in a culture of mutual accountability. Teachers watch video clips, jot down wonderings and identify benefits and challenges to support and learn from one another.
- The school fully supports students and families on a path toward college and career readiness. The quality of feedback students that receive in response to their classwork and written assignments makes families confident that their children are fully prepared. Families stated that they feel very well supported by the school. Parents receive progress reports regarding their child's advancement toward mastery of goals. These informative reports take into account formative assessment practices including conferences, interviews, and teacher observations. Teachers provide additional resources such as instructional tips about sight word acquisition skills to families so that families can support their child at home. Parent workshops provide parents with learning opportunities to support their child's progress. Parents shared during the interview that they are invited to volunteer in classrooms. In addition to parent-teacher conferences and ongoing communication between families and teachers, student-led conferences are promoted in order for the student to explain his or her progress, reflect on accomplishments, and set short and long-term goals.
- Supports are in place to effectively communicate the high expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness to families and students. Students self-select their work and it is posted on a bulletin board entitled the Pride Board. The school sends newsletters which highlights monthly events and activities to support students in developing literacy skills. Furthermore, the school has a homework policy that is distributed to all families in the beginning of the school year. This policy is sent home in English and Spanish. The policy explains the purpose of the homework, the materials and the setting needed for students to work at home, and the time that the students should spend completing their homework.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

Across content areas, teachers and school leaders tactically plan in-depth units of study that reflect the instructional shifts and are aligned to the Common Core. Rigorous habits for all students are coherently and strategically embedded into each task and unit of study.

### **Impact**

Carefully constructed units of study have resulted in coherence and student demonstration of learning in a rigorous learning environment that emphasizes higher-order thinking and college and career readiness for all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The curriculum maps integrate the Common Core in a distinct level of consistency and coherence across the school as evidenced by academic tasks. Teachers of the arts and sciences have integrated the instructional shifts into their unit plans. For example, students identified different ways to sort objects. Students went on a nature walk around the neighborhood. They collected objects on the walk that they found interesting. Students then picked objects to sort and labeled their groups with what type of objects belonged in each group.
- Teachers strategically include opportunities for students to question and pose problems, think independently, and be innovative as evident in the lesson plans. In all classrooms, students engaged in peer to peer discussions about their reading. Students with disabilities and ELLs are supported with necessary scaffolds for these units, which include the use of a variety of graphic organizers, manipulatives and targeted small group instruction. In a STEM class, students learned about inclined planes and were tasked with designing a ramp. They drew out designs and selected their own materials to make a ramp that would allow their car to go the farthest. Students tested out their ramps to see which groups' ramp worked the best and reflected on how to improve their ramp in the future.
- To improve higher-order thinking skills, an additional template that promotes close reading has been added to unit plans across subjects, including library media, the arts, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. For example, students researched to find out what the colors of the rainbow are and which colors are primary and secondary. Students went into centers to practice different ways to make the colors and to explore how water travels through paper towels. A science task showed that students were challenged to use the materials available to them to create a house that would keep a pig safe from the big bad wolf. Students had to plan out their design and then follow the plan to build it. Students tested its strength using a hairdryer to see if it would blow down. Afterwards they reflected on what happened, and how to make their house stronger the next time.