



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 121 Queens

Elementary School Q121

**126-10 109 Avenue
Queens
NY 11420**

Principal: Evelyn Vadi

**Date of review: May 17, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

The School Context

P.S. 121 Queens is an elementary school with 947 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 48% Asian, 19% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 11% students with disabilities. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.8%.

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	Focus	Well Developed
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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across a vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions into the curricula for all learners. All students engage in high-level discussions and cognitively demanding tasks.

Impact

All learners across classrooms are engaged in challenging tasks and active learning that enable them to demonstrate higher-order thinking, participation and ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In all classrooms visited, students participated in class discussions by responding to both teacher- and student-generated questions. Students not only answered questions, but also asked questions and extended their own thinking and that of their peers by providing examples from text or discussions to support their contributions. In all classes, teachers asked open-ended questions to push student thinking and facilitate responses, giving students an opportunity to deepen their thinking by questioning each other during think/pair/share, as well as in whole class discussions. In a grade 2 class, students were participating in reading groups with the assignment to independently read the text, review the gist and revisit their annotations. Students then formed groups to discuss what they discovered, define vocabulary, and describe the text, *Adapting to Survive*, from beginning to end. Differentiated groups worked on different assignments with an additional enrichment activity for students that completed the task early.
- Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use at least three higher-order thinking questions in lesson plans and instructional strategies incorporate scaffolds in the form of graphic organizers, sentence prompts and leveled questioning with careful selection of student pairs and table groups. Classroom discussion prompts and protocols are used to promote discussions and encourage classroom participation. In a grade 3 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, students were in groups with different assignments using the same non-fiction article on Nigeria. One group was discussing what goes on in a “Day in the Life,” another was discussing sightseeing events and the third was examining “native lingo.” A fourth group used laptops to examine “what is a fact and what is an opinion.” Students were highly engaged in discussions and there was a higher-order thinking seat for presentation. During whole class and group discussions, students were explaining and justifying their answers to their peers. In a grade 3 math class, students were classifying plane shapes as polygons or non-polygons and providing evidence as to why each fits into the category. Partners were sorting through bags of shapes to justify their decisions.
- Teachers have designed close reading lessons following a three-day plan of: read for key ideas and details, then read for craft and structure, a third read for integration of knowledge and ideas. Thus, students are encouraged to synthesize and analyze information from texts or media. Students then use sticky notes and graphic organizers to create questions and develop a deep and precise understanding. In a grade 1 class studying the Wright Brothers, students were learning how to identify the gist of the story while annotating for vocabulary and key ideas.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty engage in a rigorous process of curriculum development aligned to the Common Core and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Higher-order thinking skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks in a coherent way across grades and content areas.

Impact

Curricular decisions focus on continuing to build coherence and promote college and career readiness and all learners are able to demonstrate their thinking across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- All content area curricular documents highlight the strategic integration of the instructional shifts. The school has supplemented the curricula to meet the needs of all learners by adding the use of informational text and literary genres in leveled texts and translations. School-wide decisions to use rigorous reading, writing and math programs requiring students to construct responses and explain their thinking are implemented. An examination of unit plans indicate that they closely meet the needs of individual students, using rigorous content, critical thinking and problem-solving skills with a *Wonders* and *Reading Street* component aligning with the Common Core and *GO Math!* programs. Supplementary programs involve teacher-created close reading videos, *myOn* reading, *Flocabulary*, an online vocabulary program, *Mathletics*, *Discovery Education* videos in science and social studies and *Foundations* for the kindergarten through grade 2 curricula. Supplementary materials are also selected from *EngageNY*.
- Social studies and science plans indicate a focus on writing from non-fiction sources. Provisions for Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) questioning, accountable talk and academic language are embedded into every lesson plan. Students are asked to develop sound written and oral arguments. The science curriculum includes hands-on opportunities and experiments. All subject area curriculum units culminate in summative performance tasks. Scaffolding and enrichment components for all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, such as whole group, individualized study, the use of graphic organizers, higher-order teaching points and supports for student dialogue are evident.
- Modifications to units of study address gaps in student understanding. In math, instructional teams have implemented an additional discourse protocol upon studying specific student work. Consistent use of academic vocabulary and higher-order questioning skills, developed with three higher-order thinking questions in every lesson, are also implemented. Also, based on student data feedback, teachers have aligned units of study with close reading skills, annotating texts and details in supporting non-fiction reading through preparing tasks based on what is needed for students. As a school-wide focus, a deeper emphasis on strategies that provide higher-order skills and rigorous habits in individualized study, student-to-student dialogue, enrichment and remediation teaching points and tools in supporting all students to assist in college- and career-aligned activities are continuing to build across the school. A supplemental pen pal program has grade 5 students writing NYC high school students to encourage discussions about careers and college.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to create a picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects, track progress, and make curricular and instructional modifications.

Impact

An analysis of information on student learning outcomes and checks for understanding inform adjustments to curricula and instruction that meet the needs of all learners who know their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The Tri-State Rubric is used in each grade and every classroom is considered a DDC, Data-Driven Classroom. The school-wide focus is “Data moves Impact” and there are learning cycles with benchmarks using item skills analysis created per student. Curricular maps and lesson planning provide evidence that the school is embedding the use of assessments and on-going checks for understanding. Teachers use common rubrics and pre- and post-assessments across grades and subjects to track progress and adjust curricula and instruction. Checklists are used to gather information about student progress toward goals. Teachers take conference notes to help identify which students need immediate attention with learning tasks during a lesson or as a follow-up intervention.
- Teacher teams collect and compare data, look at sample work from classes that have made extreme gains and use these classes as a model. School-wide data is collected and examined to monitor the impact of learning and plan for future professional development. At several professional development meetings, teachers assembled into small clusters to look at units of study in relation to data, charting and sharing results. Task-specific rubrics were developed after accessing data using item skill analysis in English Language Arts. Also, student gaps in learning were addressed by adding the use of informational text and literary genres in leveled texts and translations.
- Students are aware of their reading level and what rubrics are and why they are “important in their reading, writing and science classes.” Student work is posted on bulletin boards and in folders and all have rubrics with meaningful feedback. Students engage in self-assessment and student-to-student checklists for math and literacy, and exit slips for reading, writing and math are embedded in instructional practices in all classrooms enabling all students to indicate their understanding at the end of a lesson or work product. Students and teachers are constantly checking for understanding in their partnership with each other, such as stop and jot and hands-up.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the school, a culture for learning is established that communicates high expectations shared by staff, families and students connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

All members of the school community clearly articulated that expectations are high and is supported by a culture of mutual accountability for teaching and learning that permeates the environment. Students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations for student learning and positive character traits are communicated to the entire school. In the teacher team meetings, it was stated that the support of administration, and by their colleagues, strengthens a common language and provides a strong culture of learning as reflected through extensive professional development, modeling, intervisitations and frequent observations with effective feedback to teachers. All classrooms have Promethean Boards and students use laptops and iPads. This has elevated strategies in lesson planning, building upon academic vocabulary using visuals and access to differentiated formats, such as Time for Kids and *Flocabulary*. Students are engaging in discussions at a higher level as seen in a grade 3 class on “Fact and Opinion” with each student using multimedia to gather and share information, engage in collaborative discussions and build on others’ ideas and express their own thoughts clearly. These conversational protocols prepare students for career and college readiness.
- Students were able to articulate how ready they are for their next level and to set goals for moving forward. Rigor has been defined as challenging children to think at a high level and to expose students to grade-level text, both fiction and non-fiction aligned to the Common Core in conjunction with Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* questioning. Teachers work collaboratively toward ensuring high expectations through daily instructional practices using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Parents interviewed stated that they appreciated the constant communication of their child’s progress. In addition, it was discussed that high expectations are reflected in the purpose and respect that is visible in hallways, classrooms and offices. Students are recognized for their academic achievement and their citizenship enhancing the goals of a college or career path, as articulated by all stakeholders. The school uses research strategies such as tug-of-war and Four Corners to motivate learning.
- Teachers are guided by school leaders who provide clear expectations for pedagogical and professional practice via verbal and written communication, and regular meetings with the principal. The Danielson *Framework for Teaching* is used to communicate high expectations related to preparation and planning, learning environment and classroom instruction. High expectations, as stated by the teachers, include that every student will acquire skills and knowledge reflective of a strong and engaging learning environment allowing students to have a voice, such as in clubs, trips and opportunities tailored to their individual needs.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Leadership structures provide a means for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and practice.

Impact

Teacher team work results in school-wide instructional coherence, and effective, shared leadership structures that build capacity to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- All departments have a common prep time which is used for teacher teams to discuss practice with peers and make timely adjustments to the curriculum and instruction. Grade team meetings meet to look at student work and discuss strategies to improve instruction and student achievement. Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data and student work, supporting each other by providing feedback on next steps to inform instruction. This was evident during a vertical grade team meeting including teachers representing kindergarten through grade 5. All voices were heard and it was stated that while examining data trends from the spring reading benchmark in kindergarten, it was discovered that identifying key details is still a skill deficit problem. A discussion ensued on the implications for teaching to get students to achieve the top level. It was determined that an academic vocabulary list was needed as well as sentence starters as scaffolding. It was also decided that a focus would take place across grades on key details in non-fiction passages.
- Each grade has a grade leader as well as core teams composed of teachers from each grade who bring information back to grade teams. Teachers stated that the collective effort of teams has a direct impact on their approaches to instruction and teacher leadership and they are using the Backward Design Model to develop goals. “Sensational 7” students are selected at the beginning of the school year to help the inquiry approach to instruction. Each teacher selects high-, mid- and low-level students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. In looking at student work of varied levels with differing needs, teachers are able to create action plans that target the students in their classroom. This information is brought to team meetings to discuss trends, areas of growth and areas that need improvement. The Professional Learning Team (PLT) analyzes the effectiveness of past professional learning sessions and designs future sessions based on staff and student needs that surface during teamwork.
- Lead teachers from across subject areas set the agenda for Monday professional development meetings. In addition, they facilitate workshops for all staff, help facilitate team meetings and work with administrators to monitor student achievement. Lead teachers attend off-site venues for workshops and subsequently, conduct turnkey training at the school. The teachers shared that their work vertically has helped build curricular and instructional coherence across grades by becoming more informed about student needs, sharing unit plans at department meetings and giving feedback to one another. There are structured intervisitations tailored by teacher leaders to support this teacher work. The impact of teacher team efforts is evident in classroom observations where more student collaborative learning and discussions take place.