Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Cypress Hills Community School
Elementary-Middle School K089

265 Warrick Street
Brooklyn
NY 11207

Principal: Irene Leon

Date of review: May 6, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Brenda Perez
The School Context

Cypress Hills Community School is an elementary-middle school with 454 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 3% Black, 95% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 43% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.2%.

School Quality Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
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<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<td>To what extent does the school…</td>
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<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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Area of Celebration

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
School Leaders consistently communicate high expectations for professional collaboration, student learning, and family supports, that exemplify a culture of mutual accountability and successful partnerships in order to raise student achievement.

Impact
School wide systems and supports provide an inclusive learning environment where high expectations are conveyed so that all teachers, students, and families, share a common understanding and mutual accountability of the expectations and all learners achieve success.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders provide professional learning opportunities to teachers around a myriad of topics that include the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Professional development is conducted via staff conferences, grade level meetings, coaching cycles, inter-visitation and teacher team collaborations. The school outlines professional learning opportunities for teachers around the school's instructional foci, ADVANCE data, and students' work products as a means of assessing student thinking and content understanding. Frequent observations are conducted and supervisory conversations and written feedback with specific next steps are provided to all teachers. Staff members are held accountable to meeting the expectations related to instructional and professional responsibilities.

- Students in grades 6 through 8 are held accountable for their learning and are involved in their assessment process. For example, parents and students reported that they participate in Student Led Conferences (SLC), in lieu of parent-teacher conferences, where the student presents their progress report, samples of work from different classes, and honestly reflects on his/her learning in order to succeed in the content area and in school.

- Families have a strong voice and play an integral role in decision-making that supports high expectations for all students. Parents and community members take an active role as members of the School Leadership Team, and Parent-Teacher Collaborative. The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, (partnered CBO), provides enrichment and instructional support for participating students. The parent co-director works alongside the principal, and contributes to a strong home-school connection. A parent stated that her son is so happy to be part of the school and programs that "if it was up to him, he would sleep at school". Additional school initiatives such as, family fitness nights, and daily parent workshops regarding parent language/technology skill development, and/or nutrition, cultivate purposeful parental involvement.

- The school is the only NYC Public School offering a dual leadership structure that includes a parent co-director working alongside the principal. In addition, it is currently the only school-wide dual language elementary school in District 19 and the sole middle school offering a dual language program. Additionally, the school's response rate in academic expectations, engagement, safety and respect, has out-performed the citywide average for all elementary and middle schools on the NYC School Survey Report, and parents reported that they are exceedingly satisfied with the school.
Findings
Instructional practices reflect the school’s belief about how students learn best. However, strategic entry points to the curricula and high quality discussions and work products vary across classrooms.

Impact
Across classrooms, some lessons did not fully demonstrate ample refinement of instructional strategies to ensure strategic entry points into the curricula to further promote ownership of learning in student discussions and work products.

Supporting Evidence
- Across classrooms teachers provided students with turn-and-talk opportunities or small group conversations prior to a whole class discussion. In an eighth grade math class conducted in Spanish, students were encouraged to turn-and-talk to their partner to discuss why the square root of the square root of four times the square root of four equaled four. Additionally, all students were asked to work in pairs to complete a math sheet on finding the square root of whole numbers and negative numbers. The teacher circulated and provided students with guided questions such as, “Can a negative number have a square root?”, and “What was your strategy to locate numbers on the number line?”

- Teachers have been building coherent practices across content areas that address the needs of all learners. For example, in an eighth grade ELA class visit, the English language arts and English as a Second Language teacher reviewed vocabulary words with students, including the English language learners. Students were provided three vocabulary words; resilient, optimistic, and generous. Students received sentence strips with passages from the novel Unbroken. Students were asked to work with their partner to match the character traits with the sentence strip they felt best matched the trait. Students shared their justification for their vocabulary choice. While the students worked, the ESL teacher circulated and checked in with each small group of students.

- While teachers engage students in lessons and activities, in many classes observed, teachers utilize the same materials. As a result, students were not challenged sufficiently or given equal opportunities to enhance academic growth or take ownership of learning. For example, in a fourth grade Integrated Collaborative Teaching math class, students were learning about mixed numerals and the teachers asked students questions such as, “What is 5+ ½?” That led student thinking through a single correct answer. Additionally, all students worked closely with each teacher in a small group on the same math page using the same manipulates.
Additional Findings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
The school uses common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies, aligned with the school’s curricula, to provide actionable feedback and to accelerate learning and student achievement.

Impact
Teachers monitor students’ progress, provide actionable feedback to students, and make effective adjustments to curricula at teacher team meetings, in order to increase student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence
- The school uses common assessments, such as Common Core Learning Standards aligned learning target assessments, and formative assessments, to monitor students’ progress toward meeting their learning goals. These assessments and students’ work products are analyzed to identify areas of focus to support student learning. Learning Target Assessments are administered three times a year. Teachers meet during teacher team meetings and common planning periods and plan and/or revise curriculum and lesson plans using the results of these assessments. Curriculum plans, and/or revisions are posted on the school-wide Google drive to facilitate collaboration and sharing of documents. Additionally, the principal reported that other forms of assessments such as Socratic circles and debates are also used and results of these assessments are used to track students’ progress across ELA and math to ensure students’ growth towards meeting goals.

- Teachers meet and collaborate to align assessments to the curricula. The school leader reported that teachers utilize a protocol for defining and refining the goals. For example, in a math unit, teachers used the guidelines to ensure that math units and assessments aligned to the standards covered and assessments were administered every two to three weeks to monitor students’ growth throughout the unit.

- Classroom visits and the student meeting disclosed that students work in pairs or in small groups for instruction. Students stated that they meet with teachers to discuss their work. An eighth grade student stated that she wrote an essay on Refugees and she had conferences with her teacher to discuss what she did well and what she needed to improve. The student stated that the teacher provides students with graphic organizers that have questions to help them organize their thoughts and she felt that this helped her to write the essay.

- Rubrics and checklists are utilized across all grades to check for understanding. Rubrics describe the performance expectations for all assignments and several students in middle school stated that the rubric is given to them before the writing task to help them understand what they have to do to get a good grade. However, elementary students reported that the teacher used the rubric to grade their work and they used a checklist to self-reflect at the end of the assignment.
Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum  
Rating: Proficient

Findings
School curricula are planned and refined using the Common Core Learning Standards, student data, and work products, to ensure a rigorous instructional program that integrates the instructional shifts and promotes college and career readiness.

Impact
Teachers plan and refine curricula so that all students, including English language learners, (ELLs), and students with disabilities, (SWDs), benefit from a range of learning experiences that foster critical thinking, support student learning, and improve student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence
- As a dual language school, the school leader and teachers have adapted the Common Core curriculum, Expeditionary Learning, and Engage NY, to meet students’ needs and cognitively challenge students. Grade teacher teams have created curriculum maps in English and Spanish in literacy and math and though finding the same text has presented a challenge, teachers reported that they work collaboratively to find the resources they need to support their work. Teacher team work, including curriculum maps and resources are shared on Google drive to ensure that all staff members have access to all information.

- School Leaders provided teachers with professional learning opportunities on refining curriculum maps and worked collaboratively to enhance the curricula. For example, the school implemented the Word Generation curriculum and made adjustments to the pacing of the program in order to meet the needs of the students. The school leader reported that teaching one unit a week did not provide students with ample time to thoroughly complete writing assignments and as a result units were extended to a two week duration allowing students to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic and ELLs and SWDs to benefit from the extra time to complete the tasks.

- Teachers utilize scaffolds such as graphic organizers, vocabulary word activities, and sentence starters within lessons to provide access into the curriculum and help students express their understanding of a topic using academic language in discussions and written work products. For example, in a second grade ICT, the learning target was “I can ask and answer questions such as, who, what, where, how and why to show that I understand a text.” The teacher read a portion of the text and modeled to her small group of students, “Why do you think it took three years to build the base of the Statue of Liberty?” She wrote her question on a post-it and placed it on her graphic organizer. Students were asked to do one together with the teacher and then the students worked independently to complete their graphic organizer.

- Students are proud and excited about the greenhouse environmental program, a supplement to the science curricula. Students are studying hydroponics/aquaponics and provided with opportunities, across all grades, to engage in observation, exploration and learning about environmental themes such as, urban gardening. During the student meeting, students passionately discussed the process of how hydroponics/aquaponics work and all the vegetables they were growing in the greenhouse. They shared how they took the vegetables they grew to the kitchen staff and the kitchen staff cleaned and showed them how to prepare them for the school’s salad bar.
Quality Indicator: 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
Across the school, teachers participate in structured horizontal and vertical teacher teams utilizing protocols to analyze classroom practice, data, and students’ artifacts. Additionally, the principal has fostered leadership structures to play an active role in decision that promote and improve student learning.

Impact
Teacher team collaboration and shared leadership opportunities promote school wide coherence, strengthen teacher capacity, and contribute to the school’s positive culture of professional learning to improve student outcomes for all learners.

Supporting Evidence
- Teacher teams meet weekly to examine class and individual student data, discuss instructional practices, and adjust curriculum and assessment design. While school leaders provide the resources, teachers focus on those elements of the inquiry cycle that they determine to provide the highest leverage. Examples include, framing questions, reading literature, tuning teacher practice, planning implementation, and examining data and student work.

  - School leaders, coaches and model teachers, lead lesson study groups to establish common practices. In grades 5 through 8, teachers participated in lesson study content groups and explored how teachers can facilitate academic conversations in their classrooms. Utilizing a template, teachers prepared a lesson and scheduled dates for inter-visitations allowing teachers to think more deeply about their teaching practices. Teachers used a conversation reflection form to provide the teacher being observed feedback.

  - During an eighth grade teacher team meeting, the English as a Second Language teacher (ESL), the special education teacher support service (SETSS) teacher and the ELA teacher looked at seven samples of student work products and identified common traits across Levels 1 to 3 to determine student understanding. Teachers focused their conversations about practice and students’ work to assess the impact of their instruction and inform what instructional practices needed to be refine. Utilizing their findings, the team outlined the next three lessons focusing on contrasting perspectives. Teachers discussed scaffolds that included reducing the number of texts for struggling learners, pairing texts, and enrichment tasks.

  - Teacher teams follow a “Looking at Student Work” protocol to examine student work and share information and revisions on Google docs, an online system. Strategies, graphic organizers, checklists, and rubrics, are posted by team members after adjustments and revisions are made allowing teachers to share the work with staff members and school leaders. School leaders shared that the system provides them with the opportunity to monitor, track, and provide feedback to the work of the teacher teams.

  - School leaders encourage distributed leadership practices so that model teachers and coaches drive key decisions related to the improvement of teacher practice. Based on the 2013-2014 Advance data, Danielson Component 3B was a challenge for the majority of teachers. The team used this data, to guide professional learning opportunities, inter-visitations, one-on-one conferencing, to meet teacher needs. As a result, Advance data demonstrates improvement in questioning and discussion techniques and students are able to articulate their thinking to teachers and their peers.