Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Isaac Remsen School

14K147

325 Bushwick Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206

Principal: Sandra Noyola

Date of review: January 9, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sheila S.-Gorski
The School Context

Isaac Remsen is an elementary school with 313 students from grade Pre-Kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 26% Black, 65% Hispanic, 6% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91%.

School Quality Criteria

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school…</strong></td>
<td><strong>Additional Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></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>
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<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>
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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><strong>Additional Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Well Developed</strong></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school…</strong></td>
<td><strong>Celebration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Well Developed</strong></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>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school…</strong></td>
<td><strong>Additional Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Well Developed</strong></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>
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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 and stakeholders take responsibility for supporting the school’s high expectations which are systematically communicated in numerous ways. The school and families work in partnership supporting student progress toward meeting those expectations.

Impact
Consistent and effective communication of the principal’s high expectations has rooted the school community in mutual accountability, successfully guiding all students toward a path that links to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence
- A culture of mutual accountability informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DfT) is focused on increasing higher-order thinking and supporting teachers with professional learning opportunities. Sustained by Teachers College staff developers, an onsite literacy specialist and staff developer, teachers continuously implement, monitor and adjust the reading and writing units of study across the subject areas. The school’s high expectations ensures professional development in Visual Thinking Strategies, (VTS) a school initiative to support the instructional focus of refining teacher practice in questioning and discussion techniques, engaging and affording all students opportunities to engage in dialogue, synthesize information and demonstrate their thinking.

- All classrooms exhibit the “High Five” Expectations strategy used as a “roadmap to success”. Students are expected to take responsibility for being prepared, engaged, safe, respectful, and responsible; learning habits that lead to resiliency and organizational skills linked to college and career persistence. A character education program and lessons taught create accountability for student achievement. Each month students focus on a positive character trait. For example, in April, the fourth grade focus is responsibility and requires students to exhibit qualities such as, planning ahead, perseverance, self-control, self-discipline, and accountability for their words, actions, and attitudes. Parents partner with the school to support their children via, “Tips for Parents” providing suggestions that include teaching, applying, advocating, and modeling the expected qualities, and reinforcing them at home.

- The school’s website committee working with parents has designed a new website affording its constituents electronic communication. For example, families can view grade specific newsletters, lunch menus, school calendars and numerous links to school information. Teachers also share the month’s unit of study. For example, in January second grade parents know the writing unit called, “Gripping Fictional Stories.” Students will pick characters, create a setting for the story, develop a problem a solution and bring characters to life with details, talk and action. Newsletters also include reminders, such as, “Please make sure you sign your child’s reading log every night.” In a first grade newsletter, students will begin a science unit on the properties of matter. Students are expected to conduct observations and describe the three states of matter. A note to first grade parents includes a list of websites to get supports for their children to practice their learning. During the parent meeting they also expressed their input in the decision to implement a Japanese Dual Language Program beginning this coming September.
Findings
Pedagogy is aligned to the curricula, reflects a shared set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teachers consistently provide scaffolds, questioning and discussion techniques.

Impact
Across classroom teachers appropriately scaffold the learning via supports that lead to entry points into the curricula. However, the use of strategic extensions and support that foster deep reasoning in student work products for all students varies across the school.

Supporting Evidence
- The school’s shared set of beliefs about how students learn best is focused on creating a child centered environment supported by the workshop model, explicit teaching, modeling and demonstration. Teachers incorporate the school’s instructional focus integrating the DfT via questions and discussions to prompt higher-order thinking. The school also utilizes Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) which entail a set of explicit questions used to develop student’s perceptions and interpretations of art work and literature-based text through the use of open-ended discussions.

- During classroom visits the use of scaffolds, questions and discussion prompts were consistently noted, yet the intentional use of extensions and supports varied from classroom-to-classroom. For example, in a fifth grade class a student partnership was asked to identify “Pop-out” and topic sentences as they read and summarized the content of the passage and then explain the relevance of the content. While one partner read the other partner asked a peer a higher-order thinking (HOT) question relative to the strategy used for the pop-out. The student asked, “What word popped out at you and what strategy did you use?” The partner replied, “The word that popped out at me was, “instinctively and I used the relevant/irrelevant strategy!” The student explained how it was relevant to know that when you do something instinctively you do it by figuring things out without much effort. In a fourth grade class students were being guided on elaboration in writing an essay by using strong words. Teachers used a “teacher model strategy” showing the students how to stop and examine their writing and then elaborate on it. While the teachers modeled and shared their thinking, students did not have the opportunity to show in-depth thinking during the lesson. Teachers moved quickly through the lesson asking numerous questions with little wait time in between.

- In all classrooms, resources such as, support charts, word walls, classroom library collections, book baskets and paper choice were accessible to students. Students were observed looking up to the charts, and supporting one another while engaged in group work. It is noted that most students knew the purpose for being a part of the current group. However, students were not always encouraged to express their thinking and extensions for learning or choices were limited. Even though all teachers asked questions, in some classrooms teachers tactically provided question scaffolds, shifting from knowledge-based questions to interpretive thinking questions prompting students into deeper thinking, while in other classrooms questions asked remained at recall levels. The school is currently focusing on strengthening teachers in questioning and discussion leveraged by the DfT via internal and external support.
Additional Findings

Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment | Rating: Well Developed

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms the use of common assessments and assessment practices reflect a plethora of modalities for examining student comprehension. Effective instructional adjustments meet the learning needs of students and they are aware of their next learning steps.

Impact
The school uses student data analysis to monitor student progress toward goals via a variety of assessments and checks for understanding and teachers make effectual adjustments, so that students are integral to their learning and demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence
- Across classrooms assessments such as, Fountas and Pinnell running records, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Writing Continuum, TC On Demand performance assessments, Go Math!, and Exemplars Problem Solving Procedures are used to monitor student progress. The school also collects observation notes for each student noting individual strengths and needs to track progress toward student goals and make instructional decisions. Further, the school administers pre and post assessments throughout each unit of study. Student data outcomes also inform inquiry work focused on student needs as indicated by data sources creating a clear picture of student progress. This is evidenced in the most recent School Quality Guide indicating the growth metrics of student progress on the state test when compared to its peer schools in 2013 at 28 percent and 2014, at 84 percent, “meeting the target” set and showing academic improvement.

- Teachers examine student data and plan next steps purposefully making adjustments, and collaborating on creating entry points. Teachers also use the running records results and end of unit assessments to create flexible student groups choosing learning resources aligned to targeted skills. Teachers continuously check student comprehension prompting students to self-assess via conference notes, checklists, child-friendly rubrics and goal setting. For example, all grades use a checklist for each genre and students use a child-friendly checklist ensuring to self-assess. One Kindergarten informational writing checklist is entitled, “How does my piece go? Students mark off “Yes or Not Yet” checking the elements in their topic as, “different things about the topic”, and “important things about the topic”. Teachers parallel this language to, craft, organization, ending, transitions, lead and overall review of whether the student has acquired the elements of the writing for that genre.

- Across the vast majority of classrooms teachers examine the trajectory of each class, grade and standard. For instance using Fountas & Pinnell reading levels targets teachers identify the lowest third, and progress for all students including, English language learners and special education students. Teachers then create a Reading Data Summary. For instance, in grades 3 through 5, data analysis shows that 96% of students made progress and that the average progress was 1.06 levels. The data also supports instructional implications, such as trends to examine around the primary grades outperforming the elementary grades and further examining possible reasons for why grade 2 was the highest performing grade.
**Quality Indicator:** 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development  
**Rating:** Well Developed

**Findings**
Teacher Teams systematically analyze classroom practice, student work and data for students they share. Teachers also play an essential role in key decisions that affect the learning across the school.

**Impact**
Teacher teams assess classroom practice and student data outcomes strategically, resulting in collective pedagogical improvements and decisions that leverage the learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**
- Teacher teams meet in eighty minute blocks and use a “Looking at Student Work” protocol to examine student work, discuss noticings and possible strategies based upon student data analysis. Teachers share their background knowledge and support one another delving deep into the data. Curricular assessments and performance tasks are used to assist in identifying learning gaps for groups of students on whom they are focused. Teams plan flexible groupings, questions, and supporting resources to use within the classroom.

- Student progress toward goals is meticulously monitored via a Student Inquiry Summary. Teachers record the reason for choosing the student as part of the inquiry group, targeted instruction, skills or strategies and progress monitoring for a period of six weeks. Student growth is recorded from the beginning of the cycle through the end of the cycle and teachers assess four times during the cycle. For example an inquiry student in grade 1 was assessed in phonics and word analysis at the beginning of the cycle and in short vowel by the end of week two. The student was observed in guided reading where the student was beginning to sound out words and reread words after stretching the word, in week three, and in the last week he was examined via a Fountas & Pinnell running record where the teacher notes that the student is beginning to decode words during the testing without prompting, so the teacher made a key decision to move the student from Level H to Level I and writes in the narrative of student progress, “He has moved up a reading level; he tried hard to use decoding while reading.”

- School leaders have selected teachers whose professional strengths indicate leadership skills to lead collaborative professional learning communities. During these meetings, the Staff Developer, Literacy Specialist and lead teachers act as facilitators to lead pedagogical discussions regarding the delivery of instruction. The Data Specialist also provides assistance on looking at student work in order to drive instruction.

- The principal has identified teachers, specialists, and a staff developer as the core of the professional development committee, to facilitate school-wide and small group professional learning communities. Based upon the results of teacher surveys and classroom observations these lead teachers play an integral role in the sessions for this work.
**Quality Indicator:** 1.1 Curriculum  
**Rating:** Proficient

**Findings**
The school ensures a Common Core aligned curricula, makes purposeful decisions to build coherence and uses data and student work to encourage higher-order thinking for a diversity of learners.

**Impact**
School leaders and faculty promote college and career readiness across grades and subjects via focused decisions to integrate the instructional shifts and emphasize rigorous habits for all students.

**Supporting Evidence**
- The school has chosen to implement the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) as its model in the area of literacy. The TCRWP is Common Core aligned and its literacy units of study are also aligned to the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). Additionally, the curriculum includes units of study in reading, writing, math, science and social studies. In math the school implements the Go Math! Curriculum in grades K through 5. This program was chosen for its alignment to the Common Core and its integration of technology providing students with a framework toward mastery of math concepts.

- To support the school’s instructional focus which is, improving higher-order thinking the school uses the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) program to encourage discussions of selected works of visual art. Each Wednesday the entire school engages in the implementation of the “Drop Everything Wednesday” designed to tap into students critical thinking skills via use of interpretation of the visual arts, problem solving procedures, and an interactive read aloud that promotes discussions between students. The school also uses VTS to focus on questioning and discussion techniques, student engagement and rigorous habits leveraged by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers plan lessons based on the following three open-ended questions: “What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? And what more can we find?” The curriculum materials include 10 lessons per year and museum visits. Students are required to observe the works of art, carefully discuss their observations, support their ideas with evidence, listen to and reflect on their peer’s views, and discuss their interpretations.

- A review of the units of study indicate that every unit begins with a welcome to the unit an overview, an essential question, several bends scaffolding the unit expectations, the Common Core Learning Standards addressed in the unit and a pre-assessment. Lesson plans consistently depict a teaching point to be accomplished in a given period, a connection to quickly review prior work and link to the new work, engagement of the new work, active engagement where students try, share and show their work, independent practice, so students try the work on their own and a share a summary. Additional planning of supports includes classroom libraries, NY Ready books and short texts.