# The School Context

Elias Howe is an elementary school with 360 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 12% Black, 47% Hispanic, 18% White, and 20% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 - 2014 was 94.1%.

## School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school regularly...</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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### School Culture

<table>
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<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<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>Additional Findings</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

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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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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Area of Celebration

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

Findings
Teachers work in teams that are genuinely collaborative, distributive, and strongly focused on lifting all students by focusing on authentic student goals leading towards increased student outcomes and shared improvements in teacher practice.

Impact
Teachers are constantly refining their practice and supporting one another on behalf of improving student outcomes and share a sense of ownership for the progress, resulting in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- During the grade three through five vertical team meeting, team members closely examined transcripts of student conversations about a complex math problem. They measured the quality of these conversations against a school wide rubric about questioning and discussion that was created as part of the work on the instructional focus. By closely examining these intricately detailed transcripts, they were able to pinpoint specific needs as well as the recent accomplishments of the targeted students. In particular they focused on the growth of a few students who were previously reluctant to engage in conversation during small groups but now had contributed vociferously to the conversation being analyzed.

- After analyzing the small group transcripts, the team began to unpack the instructional practices that led to student improvement. In addition, they began to plan together for the next small group math conversation. A rich conversation ensued in which the role of the actual mathematical content knowledge was debated, so the teachers agreed to figure out a way to measure the impact of the mathematical content knowledge on the quality of the conversations at their next meeting.

- Teachers at the school feel empowered by the work they do in their teams and the roles they are able to play in the school with respect to curriculum, pedagogy, culture and all school policies. Teachers take a lot of initiative to make their professional development needs known to the principal, and she in turn fosters the sharing of their knowledge. Team structures ensure that leadership is distributed; while the instructional cabinet steers the instructional focus, the teams share responsibility. Each member of the team has a different role and these roles rotate as necessary. An open and intricate system of peer inter-visitations and a professional development calendar that emphasizes colleagues learning from one another support all teachers regardless of their stage of development.
Area of Focus

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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
While the school utilizes multiple types of assessment tied to their curricula as a means of enacting its holistic approach to meeting student needs; there are some inconsistencies with respect to student work analysis.

Impact
Teachers develop a broad picture of their students' strengths and areas for growth and use this information to help direct the appropriate instructional strategy, tool, or intervention towards individuals or groups of students with uneven results.

Supporting Evidence
- School-wide rubrics, for example, in persuasive writing, classroom discussion, or inquiry projects, have elevated student ownership over their work. An important element of these rubrics is that, although the foundational elements are the same, the staff has worked collectively to identify the precise differences that are required from grade to grade in order to meet the standard. This enables both students and teachers to carefully raise expectations while building on something familiar. During the student group, some older students who were familiar with rubrics from an earlier grade were able to help support some of their youngest schoolmates while they were sharing their work. It was clear they were familiar with the school-wide rubrics that were in use.

- Multiple assessments are used to help determine instructional supports. For example, lower grade teachers use both the Early Childhood Assessment in Mathematics and unit assessments from the math curriculum to create daily "centers" where students can practice their skills or deepen their thinking in addition to the whole class instruction for the day. Most teachers will use some of the center time to conduct conferences or interviews with students as yet another means of assessment. Parents of lower grade students spoke with a high degree of specificity about their children's precise at-the-moment needs.

- There is a strong connection between classroom teachers and service providers or out of classroom teachers, who are always sharing information about students and using that information to help inform one another's work. For example, highly detailed notes from the reading specialist and the intervention specialist are shared at regular progress meetings, where classroom teachers can see how this aligns to the results they have seen in their own formative assessments. This enables them to create classroom experiences that support precise needs.

- While practice in assessment and grading is quite consistent throughout the school, the principal and her instructional team have identified student work analysis and student self and peer assessment, particularly in writing and math, as areas that merit further exploration to ensure they are developing optimal independence in learners even in the youngest grades.
Findings
The school carefully considers the needs of its students when selecting and adapting curricula that is aligned the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), including the arts and ensure that academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits across grades and subject areas.

Impact
All students experience a meaningful curriculum that promotes authentic writing, complex problem solving and a chance to develop talents which can showcase their learning in multiple ways.

Supporting Evidence
- Recognizing that their previous literacy curriculum did not result in significant progress for their English language learners and students with disabilities, the school adopted Expeditionary Learning. After beginning to implement it last year, they recognized there were aspects of the previously used approach that would still be beneficial to many students. To address this, their grade teams have been simultaneously implementing new Expeditionary Learning units while also infusing the most successful aspects of their Teachers' College work. Similarly, they have closely examined their math curriculum and have done the same work in teasing out the components of each curricular approach to determine the best way to meet their student's needs. In math, this particularly includes an emphasis on deepening accountable conversations and increasing the authentic use of academic language. Close reading of text is grounded in vocabulary development as well. Students as young as first grade engage in letter writing to convince their parents or teachers to do something.

- The school implements "inquiry studies" as part of its social studies and science curricula. For example, the second grade did a lengthy "subway study" that looked at the subway system from many perspectives. Learning activities required that students examined the technical aspects of the system by studying maps and reading about the subway but also conducted research about different aspects of the subway by interviewing subway workers and commuters. In addition tasks include observing stations at different times of day, looking at the art and writing in the subway and then writing themselves, creating informational books for classmates about different components of the subway - everything from safety to "Poetry in Motion," and finally, engaging in an analysis of how the subway is integral to the working of the larger city and its people. The written work produced from these studies as well as the sophisticated conversation students are able to have on these topics, including English language learners and students with disabilities, highlights the way they contribute to higher order thinking.

- A cornerstone of the school's curriculum is their focus on the arts. The extensive arts offerings provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate their thinking in a wide variety of ways. In addition to a myriad of highly engaged external arts partners, the school has its own music and visual arts teachers who, as full participants on curricular teams and teacher teams, have also integrated many CCLS shifts in to their curriculum. Students have a lot of chances to "show what they know," whether in a performance or as part of the school's Learning Fairs which highlight the work done in the inquiry studies. During the student work meeting, English language learners proudly and articulately shared both artwork and writing that readily demonstrated their understanding of social studies concepts they had recently learned.
Findings
Instructional practice across classrooms consistently reflects the school’s beliefs about holistic education, the importance of providing scaffolds and extensions, and ensuring active participation and ownership, while also highlighting each teacher’s individual strengths and approaches.

Impact
The coherence of teacher beliefs supports all students in producing written, oral or artistic work that is typically very personally meaningful to them, and they are able to describe what they learned and why they learned it.

Supporting Evidence

- Students in seven out of eight grade level classrooms and both arts classrooms visited were given multiple opportunities to share their thinking with one another, whether in pairs, in shared writing, or as a large group. Teachers often step back and let students direct their conversations, seeing their role as one of facilitator by asking rich questions that provoke good conversation. For example, the art teacher asked students to talk with one another about the painting they were analyzing and discuss where they had seen elements of this technique before. This led to a larger conversation about archetypes in art and even had some of the students referencing and analyzing their own previous artwork.

- In teams, the teachers have developed a series of response frames and a repertoire of questions meant to push student thinking as part of their instructional focus. During a math lesson, the students were tackling a complex problem and were asked to share how they approached solving it. In order to support a student who had a misconception, the teacher had him demonstrate his work at the Smart Board. As he worked through the problem, the teacher asked a series of questions and encouraged his classmates to ask questions as well. The whole class remained engaged and many children asked high quality questions and used precise academic language to help him unpack his thinking. He was then able to demonstrate that he understood the concept. The principal later shared with me that this student was a student with disabilities, illustrating the teacher’s understanding that he, and all the students, could benefit by deepening the discussion, exchanging ideas, and the extra time, while also holding them all to a high standard.

- The school believes that art, movement, music and tending to the social and emotional lives of children are critical to running an effective classroom and meeting all student needs. Teachers find many ways to engage students in presentation, public speaking, debate, analysis and creative expression and students are very comfortable being outspoken and sharing their work publicly. In addition to a great deal of content connected artwork being evident throughout the building, several classrooms incorporated movement, ranging from a simple “stretch your body, stretch your mind” moment, to more elaborate exercises while transitioning.
Findings
The school has a strong culture of aspiration and expectation, particularly around preparation for college and career that is communicated in multiple ways to all stakeholders.

Impact
Clear expectations and communication result in students, their families, and their teachers having a deep personal investment in the success of every student.

Supporting Evidence

- A large group of parents representing all grade levels and student demographics attended the parent meeting. They were unanimous in their agreement about the school's expectations, specifically identifying the holistic approach the school takes in educating their children and readily acknowledging that ensuring students can meet or exceed grade level expectations is at the heart of all decisions that teachers make on behalf of their students. Several parents of special needs students were effusive in their praise for the ways their children now read on grade level, engage in public speaking or write arguments. One parent who has both a child with special needs as well as a child, who had been eligible for a gifted and talented program, spoke about how both children have always had their needs met at the school and that expectations were the same for both students. Although the school's website is considered by families to be "one stop shopping" in terms of communication with the school, parents emphasized that they understand the school's expectations not only from electronic means but more so from the day to day interactions they have with the teacher, the class, the principal and with their own children. A lot of this occurs during Family Fridays, where parents can come in to observe a lesson and engage in a discussion about the content being taught.

- Parents and students both spoke at length about how they are prepared for the next level of their education. For example, everyone was aware of the way in which the nightly reading requirement grows at each grade level, both in terms of time and level of independence. They described the evolution from lower grades reading aloud to their children or parents, to engaging in a dialogue with a classmate about their reading in the upper grades. They described how teachers will specifically model a conversation or debate and then expect the students to engage in their own.

- There is a culture of mutual accountability amongst the staff that is driven by the teacher teams, but also driven by the students’ needs. Teachers communicate with one another often about student progress, and demonstrate personal investment, even in students who are not currently in their individual classes but may be a part of their club or even alumni. The work that teachers have done together in developing grade appropriate rubrics highlights their desire to hold one another and the students accountable in a developmentally appropriate way. Parents expressed that teachers even communicate with middle school teachers to ensure a smooth transition for their students.