Quality Review Report

2014-2015

The Salk School of Science
Middle School M255
320 East 20th Street
New York
NY 10003

Principal: Rhonda Perry

Date of review: January 29, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Lucia Perez-Medina
The Salk School of Science is a middle school with 365 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 4% Black, 8% Hispanic, 64% White, 20% Asian students and 2% Multiracial students. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.0%.

### School Quality Criteria

#### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</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>Well Developed</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>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>Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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#### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</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>Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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#### Systems for Improvement

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<th>To what extent does the school…</th>
<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<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
Staff members systematically communicate to students and families a well-defined and uniform set of high expectations for all students to be college and career ready, with multiple supports and structures.

Impact
The school’s culture for learning creates strong partnerships with students and families, contributing to a deep understanding of school goals and expectations for all students, and resulting in all students mastering expectations for advancement to their next academic level.

Supporting Evidence
- The school shares their expectations with families in various forums including the Welcome Tea in June, an annual Curriculum Night, a welcome breakfast in September and the Parent Association (PA) meetings throughout the school year where various departments present to parents. Furthermore, parents are invited to observe classes and celebrate their children’s work frequently, and to attend Math/Science nights. In addition, staff developers, Network coaches and teachers have workshops for parents to help them better understand the shifts in the Common Core State Standards. Grade teams work together to send weekly newsletters to families via the school website about upcoming content areas and skills that will be addressed. They also post homework to this site and send home letters of concern prior to sending report cards if necessary.

- During the parent interview parents stated that families receive four report cards yearly, and letters of concern if necessary, detailing how students have performed in various content and skill areas. Parents have weekly access to teachers during the Tuesday parent engagement time to better understand how their children are performing and how to support them. The principal and parent coordinator also write to parents weekly to keep them informed of school events and share ideas for supporting learners with various skills. The guidance counselor meets with every family to talk to them about high school and college readiness and the PA invites back alumni to share their high school perspective. Each year, the school selects two alumni to be the keynote speakers at graduation to share stories of their life in high school, college and their career choice.

- Ongoing collection and collegial collection of exemplary student work is a practice at the school that serves to inform future instruction and assessments in all classrooms as well as communicates high expectations for rigorous work.

- The school has a well-designed web site to communicate with staff, students and families where they post school calendars, curriculum maps, homework and projects, newsletters and more. The parent coordinator, administration and grade teams send weekly updates to parents. All members of the Salk community have email access through this website to facilitate communication including weekly notices from the administration about upcoming events, reminders, and articles of interest.
Findings
Assessment practices are aligned to the school’s curricula and incorporate use of ongoing checks for understanding; however there are a few missed opportunities for teachers to make effective adjustments to meet all students learning needs, particularly students with disabilities.

Impact
Assessment data provides teachers with feedback on students’ performance across most subject areas, resulting in most teachers addressing immediate needs of individuals or groups of students to accelerate their learning.

Supporting Evidence
- In most classroom visited formative assessment practices were strategically embedded in daily lessons via questioning, sharing of ideas from group or partner work and exit slips providing for immediate feedback on student mastery of content and skills related to learning goals.

- Teachers plan based on analyses of student work and on information they have on individual students. Across most classrooms visited, teachers were doing frequent check-ins, giving targeted feedback, creating small learning groups that target skills and provided opportunities for students to self-assess their work.

- The school’s recent data dive revealed that in English language arts (ELA) teachers need to continue to deepen their work around informational text by improving their practice around close readings and allotting more time for on-demand writing. In math, the finding was to deepen the work around the number system and ratio and proportional relationships.

- Most students shared how they used the rubrics attached to their writing pieces as feedback regarding what they did well and how they could improve their work. One student stated, “I need to use more transitional words and clear language in my writing.” Another student added, “Rubrics help us understand what we need to do to improve our work.” Three students pointed out that their rubrics highlights the indicators mastered and next steps in humanities, while two students couldn’t articulate their next learning steps in mathematics. One student stated that his teacher gave him feedback through Google-docs, a document sharing service. A review of student work revealed limited actionable feedback across all subject areas, particularly science and mathematics. Some science and math assignments revealed meaningful feedback and student reflections.

- In a 6th grade Integrated Co-Teaching class, teachers used writing assessment data to make adjustments to support students with organization, introductions and details in their opinion writing pieces. Teachers identified varied writing levels and grouped students for instruction based on the identified needs surfaced through the analysis of the data.
**Additional Findings**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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**Findings**

Across subject areas and grades, curricula aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts offer all students rigorous learning experiences that require them to demonstrate high levels of critical thinking.

**Impact**

All students' benefit from well-developed Common Core-aligned curricula that drive coherent instruction in all disciplines and result in all students making steady and sustained progress towards college and career readiness goals.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Using a cloud-based document sharing service, teams collaboratively refine curriculum maps and units of study, ensuring coherence of curricula and deep alignment to the Common Core State Standards across grades and content areas. The school designs their curriculum by planning backwards using Wiggins’ and McTighe’s Understanding by Design framework with the goal to incorporate the habits of mind of professionals in various fields so that students can be engaged in authentic, intellectually rigorous work that requires them to think deeply and use higher order thinking skills. Teachers engage in a practice of collecting and sharing exemplary student work that demonstrates strong critical thinking skills and that exceeds standards on their rubric at the end of each unit. These pieces serve to inform future instruction and become anchor pieces for them and their students. Refinement of units is part of the school’s ongoing practice, which serves to increase the rigor and quality of the work that students produce.

- Members of the science community, including the New York University (NYU) School of Medicine and the NYU School of Dentistry, supplement lessons in science and health. They also mentor students identified by the staff in grades 6 through 8. Students in each grade are required to do a major science project that they exhibit at a grade-wide Exploratorium. The event gives students the opportunity to develop a curiosity they have in an area of science, to explore this area through hands-on learning experiences, to research a question or topic in-depth, and to discuss and reflect on what they have learned.

- Teachers refine curriculum to include more close reading of informational and literary text and writing to argue, inform and explain. Math teachers are vertically aligning the curriculum through the lens of student conceptual, developmental and procedural knowledge in each grade in order to shore up student foundational experiences, especially in the area of the number system and ratio and proportional relationships.

- Unit maps, lesson plans and student work viewed show academic tasks that are threaded through themes linked to complex texts that immerse students in intellectually demanding learning activities. For example, in all subjects students are required to complete tasks such as evidence-based position papers that involve making a claim, analyzing and supporting the claim, and presenting their work to teachers and peers. Additionally, across content areas there are projects requiring students to delve deeply into academic vocabulary in producing informational essays or describing problem-solving steps.
Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy  
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Across most classrooms, teaching strategies and academic tasks immerse students in rigorous work and discussions that foster higher-order thinking. Instructional strategies illustrate some use of extensions that enrich discussions and evoke student ownership of learning.

Impact
Cognitively demanding tasks promote rapid student progress towards being college and career ready in most classes. In a minority of classes there are missed opportunities observed to further deepen student learning via completion of tasks that allow all students to demonstrate high levels of discussions and ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence
- Within each subject area and across grade levels, lessons offered some opportunities for students in flexible groupings to learn and practice new concepts and skills with peers and individually, through focus questions provided by teachers. For example, groups of students in an 8th grade math class collaborated with peers in other groups to use decomposition to create expressions for each angle, then come up with and write a shared response to a problem on a chart paper. Similarly, in a humanities class, pairs of students worked together to evaluate quotes for relevance and choose the best one to support a claim.

- Tasks and lessons facilitated student participation, sustained student-to-student dialogue in most classrooms visited. For example, in a humanities class, the teacher used effective questioning to drive high level peer-to-peer questioning and discussion as students worked in groups or with partners, reading quotes from an article and evaluating quotes for relevance. However, this practice of routinely inviting students to comment on responses by peers or ask their own questions about content being read or discussed was not evident in a few of the classrooms visited. In one case, after presenting content about cell analogy in a mini-lesson, the teacher showed a few examples of how cell organelles are like the organ in the human body while students waited to share their responses and then led to an activity where they had to come up with their own analogy, without inviting any students to explain the rationale for their response to struggling peers.

- In three out of seven classrooms visited, all students worked on the same task with some variation in approaches in some instances. Differentiation or extensions of tasks to maximize student ownership of learning was evident in some classrooms. In two classes all students had to complete a science worksheet presented by the teacher who walked around assisting students one by one, while others worked on the assigned task. In a math class students worked with a partner on a yellow cards showing the connection between decimal and fraction addition.
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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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**Findings**
Scheduled professional collaborations allow teams of teachers to share content knowledge and instructional strategies for improving teaching and learning across the school. Distributed leadership practices offer staff members varied opportunities to work with peers and administrators in making high level decisions about school improvement goals and initiatives.

**Impact**
The inclusion of all staff in a multitude of teams empowers all teachers to assume responsibility for collectively improving teacher practice and student mastery of applicable performance standards, while also providing opportunities for teachers to be deeply involved in school level decision-making.

**Supporting Evidence**
- Team leaders and department chairs develop the agendas and are responsible for maintaining minutes from these meetings, which are all shared using Google docs, a cloud-based document sharing platform. Grade leaders work with staff developers and institutions that they partner with to shape their work with teachers within various departments and to ensure that the work aligns to the overall school-wide goals.

- The school encourages distributive leadership through a schedule that allows teachers to collaborate during the school day to plan their instruction and be responsive to students. Also, grade teams of teachers have common planning time in order to discuss students, to collaborate on an interdisciplinary project or to think about classroom practice. They are led by a team leader who works with the school cabinet to design the agenda for meetings both during the school day and after school.

- Team meetings often center around sharing best practices in terms of assessment or instruction; looking at student data and using it for planning curriculum, instruction and pedagogy; aligning the curriculum horizontally to the standards collaborating on units or planning trips; looking at student work and assessment rubrics; planning interventions and supports for individual students or meeting with families to set goals. Teams also meet to plan out their weekly advisories and to craft newsletters to parents informing them of upcoming units of study and trips.

- Teachers at the team meetings stated that they provide regular input in school level decision-making due to the principal’s commitment to engaging all staff members on decision that affect learning across the school. Teachers shared that they are looking at issues around student engagement and ownership of their learning and will continue to make strategic shifts in their practice that improve upon small group instruction, feedback and differentiation. They selected students to track over time and determine student growth in engagement as measured by student self-evaluations, peer feedback, and quality of student work produced. Teachers stated that the goal by June is to see growth in student engagement and ownership of learning.