Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Pelham Gardens Middle School
Middle School X566
2545 Gunther Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469

Principal: Denise Williams

Date of review: May 18, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jeremy Kabinoff, Ed.D.
Pelham Gardens is a middle school with 474 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 68% Black, 29% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.0%.

### 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>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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<tr>
<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>Well Developed</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>
</tr>
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#### Systems for Improvement

<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>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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training for professionalism, instruction, communication, and other elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations, and provides guidance supports to all learners.

Impact
Systems and structures for communicating high expectations and providing professional learning opportunities to staff ensure a culture of mutual accountability for meeting those expectations. Effective advisement reinforcements ensure that all students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence
- The principal established a professional learning opportunity plan based on components 3b (Questioning and Discussion), 3c (Student Engagement) and 3d (Assessing for Understanding) of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Furthermore, the principal’s professional learning opportunity plan demonstrated use of the Measures of Teacher Practice data and grouped the teachers accordingly. The plan included the topics as well as highlighted the lead facilitators and participants. Initially, 37% of the teaching staff were rated “Effective” with regard to Domain 3 but after professional development, 52% of the teachers are currently rated “Effective”.

- The school communicates high expectations to families and students via Skedula, a program that informs families of student progress, academic achievement and social/emotional issues. In addition, the school uses a school messenger system to inform families of a number of parent-sponsored activities such as fundraisers, the prom, graduation and college trips. Trips have ranged from visiting Fordham University, Lehman College, and the Bronx Zoo to Washington D.C.

- The school has adopted an anti-bullying campaign where students participate in Town Hall advisory sessions discussing attributes of being an up-stander, not a by-stander. In addition, the school has made great use of the New York City Department of Education’s “Respect for All” campaign, utilizing and disseminating the initiative’s lesson plans inside the classroom as well as partnering with students and families to promote anti-bullying literature around the school. Students engage in the “Brothers Making Bread” program, where three staff members mentor male students with regard to real-life scenarios such as social media, college preparation, responsibility and social/emotional awareness. In addition, the program’s goal is to increase male students’ self-esteem, improve discipline and overall academic achievement. In addition, female students are offered the opportunity to participate in “The Catching the Dreams of Tomorrow” program sponsored by a Delta Sigma Theta chapter. The program provides young females with educational and enrichment activities as well as insight around self-image, self-esteem, self-awareness, healthy body image, nutrition and fitness and career exploration.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
Teacher practices across classrooms are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and reflect coherence around a set of beliefs regarding how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Across classrooms, tasks and teaching strategies provide students with opportunities to engage in high-level discussions with peers.

Impact
The curricular aligned teaching practices that are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts drive the assignment of rigorous tasks that ensure a high level of participation, resulting in student work products and discussions that reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence
- During a grade 6 math lesson, students actively worked in teams to solve various problem sets with regard to range of numbers. Students went from station to station, solved various Common Core aligned math word problems, and justified their answers. Afterward, student teams came together to discuss, question and support their conclusions.

- In a grade 8 English language arts (ELA) lesson, students engaged in a jigsaw activity based on the article, “The Fourteen Part Message”, which is about events from World War II. Students read the article, recorded their responses to guiding questions and noted their observations during the group conversation. Although the lesson reflected the principal's belief system of discussion and engagement, it was evident that the students were becoming familiar with the process due to the teacher's constant prompting during the session.

- While the school demonstrated thorough and rigorous planning, it was evident that the level of discussion and engagement varied from classroom to classroom. For example, while one classroom promoted accountable talk, another classroom demonstrated general student-to-student conversation around solving for mean, median and mode.

- The majority of reviewed lesson plans reflected multiple entry points, such as pre-scripted scaffold questions and strategic grouping. For example, an ELA lesson plan highlighted the teacher's strategic grouping as evidenced by the “Grouping Plan According to Data” template, where the teacher assigned students to four different groups: above grade level, at grade level, somewhat below grade level and significantly below grade level. In addition, the plan demonstrated the differentiation strategies for each of the subgroups as well.
Additional Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders and faculty ensure curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize higher-order skills across grades and content for all students.

**Impact**

The aligned curricula lead to purposeful decisions that build coherence that promotes college and career readiness for all students. Students are engaged in rigorous habits and higher-order skills such as analyzing and synthesizing information.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school promotes college and career readiness by embedding the expectation that students cite evidence to support arguments and determine the theme or central idea of a text in grades 6 through 8 in math, ELA, science and social studies.

- A review of written lesson plans across all subject areas demonstrated that in-class activities required students to evaluate a higher-order thinking question and use their evidence to defend their ideas, develop logical arguments, analyze information from multiple sources, and apply concepts to real world situations. For example, in a social studies lesson plan, the students were required to determine the purpose of the article, annotate and extract evidence from each paragraph and determine the message and purpose of the reading.

- Lesson plans reflected access for all learners as evidenced by a grade 8 ELA lesson that utilized differentiated strategies for the auditory, read-write and visual learners within the class. Another example from a grade 6 English Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class highlighted access to all learners by noting strategies ranging from independent exercises, think-pair-share, PowerPoint presentations and graphic organizers.
Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment  Rating:  Well Developed

Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned to the school's curricula. Assessment practices consistently incorporate the use of ongoing checks for understanding and self and peer reflection.

Impact
The school's assessments, rubrics and grading policies offer a clear portrait of student mastery and provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding academic achievement. Daily reflections and checks for understanding lead to effective instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence
- The principal and a vertical teaching team established a new criterion for the school's grading policy where each department has the autonomy to establish their percentages based on the principal's expectation of increasing the accountability of in class more than out of class assignments. For example, all the department grading policies are comprised of homework, daily tasks, projects, participation and tests with major emphasis on projects, participation and daily tasks to ensure that percentages for homework assignments for students who do not have the opportunity to complete them do not significantly alter their grade. The school instituted this policy to take into account extenuating external circumstances that impede homework completion to enable all students to make progress with their grades. The percent of students passing the core classes has risen over 7% from the previous year. In addition, the school's promotion of the honor roll has resulted in an 8% increase in students obtaining a 90 or higher grade point average.

- The school promotes the use of rubrics along with extensive teacher actionable feedback as well as peer feedback from students. This is evident on the majority of the school's bulletin boards, which demonstrate Common Core aligned rubrics with actionable next steps from teachers and peer reviewed feedback from the students in the form of "Glows and Grows". An “Are we created equal?” bulletin board exhibited teacher feedback and student comments. One example of student feedback emphasized the fact that there was not enough evidence inside the paragraphs to support their argument. On another bulletin board, “Bending not breaking”, student feedback articulated that another student needed to make their topic sentences stronger as well as explaining their evidence. On a math bulletin board, rubric based feedback from students suggested that some responses needed to be properly labeled and that reasoning for the response be justified. Lastly, the school promoted and put forth a “Helping Students Craft Feedback Statement”, training students to better understand how to give effective feedback using the prompts of: “This piece would be stronger if…”, “I noticed that piece of work is missing…”, “This piece of work fully answers the question being asked by…” and “This piece of work has the following errors…”.

- Classroom visits demonstrated a consistent practice with regard to the use of assessing for understanding. It was evident that a variety of assessment practices were being utilized such as student teams using the individual marker boards in an ELA lesson, students using the red, yellow, and green cup strategy inside a science classroom, as well as teachers stopping the lesson and readdressing the class based on what the teacher observed. For example, an ICT ELA classroom teacher stopped her lesson, addressed the issue of her students not annotating correctly, and had them go back and correct the issue. In the Spanish foreign language class, the teacher stopped the class to address the use of “Es la” versus “Son las” with regard to telling time.
Quality Indicator: 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development
Rating: Proficient

Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributed teacher leadership structures are embedded throughout the school.

Impact
The professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals, the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and are strengthening the instructional practice of teachers. Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in school-wide decisions that affect student learning throughout the school.

Supporting Evidence
- The majority of teachers meet during common planning periods and departmental/grade meeting times during the regular school day. The principal has developed a schedule where teachers and teacher teams have the opportunity to meet on grade level by department as well as vertically where teachers from all subject areas, including the arts and foreign language, meet to discuss teacher pedagogy and student achievement. In addition, the school promotes work around strengthening teacher capacity by utilizing the Monday professional development time slots to promote work around their instructional focus of questioning and discussion as well.

- Based on survey data from the previous year, teachers indicated that the principal’s expectation around planning and preparation was unclear as evidenced by the number of teachers receiving ineffective or developing ratings based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The principal established a teacher team to formalize the lesson planning process, strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers and emphasize elements such as reasonable time allocations, multiple entry points, learning targets, group composition, mini-lesson and assessment strategies. Current data indicates that teachers have increased their effectiveness ratings by 10%.

- Distributive leadership opportunities were evident during the teacher team meeting, where a teacher leader facilitated a professional learning opportunity series on enhancing classroom culture. The teacher leader stated that the school moved to more restorative practices around student behavior based on the principal’s belief of establishing strong relationships with students and teachers establishing a positive rapport with their students. Furthermore, the teacher leader and teacher team developed and distributed a student culture survey based on how students felt about the school. Currently, teacher ratings for establishing a rapport have increased by 15% in the number of teachers moving from “Developing” to “Effective”.