Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 181 Brooklyn
Elementary - Middle School K181
1023 New York Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203

Principal: Victor Essanason

Date of review: December 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop
**The School Context**

P.S. 181 Brooklyn is an elementary – middle school with 851 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 0% Asian, 85% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 9% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.4%.

**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>Developing</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>Developing</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</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>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>Proficient</td>
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<thead>
<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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<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>
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Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all constituencies; provide training to staff, and ongoing feedback to families connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact
Staff members hold themselves accountable for student progress and families understand how their children are meeting those expectations.

Supporting Evidence
- All groups interviewed attribute their understanding of high expectations to the work of the school leadership team and school supervisors who prioritize college and career preparation for all students. School leaders consistently communicate expectations via monthly school calendars, the staff handbook, email communications, in-person meetings, and professional learning communities.

- The leadership team supports teacher development and training via both formal and informal observations for teachers, which highlights their Measures of Teacher Practice observation options. The majority of teachers selected Option 4, which includes a minimum of four informal observations. This option can only be selected if a teacher was rated Effective in the prior school year. Teachers who have been rated ineffective or developing are provided professional development opportunities to address their growth areas.

- Staff members expressed that parents play a vital role in the success of students and that the school values their relationships with families. The school developed their first handbook for families to ensure communication is clear, concise, and written to highlight basic rules and expectations. The school also communicates regularly with parents via grade level newsletters in English, French, and Spanish, which include information about the different content areas, student academic achievements, and special notes and reminders.

- Workshops for families focus on curriculum and are offered both in the mornings and afternoons to accommodate parent schedules. The new school leadership team established an orientation for parents of English Language Learners facilitated by two ESL teachers. All parents receive monthly and trimester progress reports with performance data on their childrens’ academic content area and arts learning, as well as their personal/social behavior.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching are becoming aligned to curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. However, teaching strategies do not always provide multiple entry points nor fully engage all students in appropriately challenging tasks.

Impact
Implementation of teaching strategies that do not consistently provide multiple entry points leads to uneven student engagement and limited evidence of critical thinking on the part of students.

Supporting Evidence
- The school belief system is that students learn best when they are in flexible groups, using academic vocabulary, and have access through multiple entry points. The school leadership team has placed an emphasis on writing across the content areas and incorporating Depths of Knowledge (DOK) questioning levels one to three into all classroom discussions.

- In some classrooms, a teacher-centered approach with low-level questioning techniques limited student-to-student engagement. For example, in one class the essential question was, “What are working conditions and why do they matter?” Students then engaged in a whole group discussion followed by additional DOK level one questions including, “Does the character lose her freedom?, Who comes to visit the character and why?”, and “What does the character start to think about?” In contrast, in some other classrooms the essential question invited students to lead the discussion and reflect on their thinking. For example, in a math class students were asked, “How do you write an equation to model a linear function with a decreasing relationship?” Students worked on differentiated activities that were scaffolded to provide access for all learners. Students with disabilities and English Language Learners completed the tasks with guided steps on how to find the slope and y-intercept, and write the equation.

- In a classroom with students with disabilities, students worked on different writing tasks and projects in pairs, individually, or with a paraprofessional. However, the information projected on the SMARTboard to guide the students did not connect with their learning objectives, which caused some confusion for students who were working independently and needed additional guidance.

- During a math lesson, the teacher gave very explicit directions and the routines and structures of the class were evident. Students worked in groups and on the computers on differentiated tasks, yet not all students were engaged in their work because they either had completed the assignment or did not understand all of the task elements.
## 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 a Common Core-aligned curricula that integrates the instructional shifts making purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness. Teachers use student work and data to plan curricula and academic tasks to provide access and cognitive engagement for a diversity of learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

### Impact
A diversity of learners benefit from curricula that provides access and promotes college and career readiness for a diversity of learners.

### Supporting Evidence
- The school implements the Common Core Learning Standards using Ready Gen curricula in grades K-5, Expeditionary Learning in grades 6-8, GO Math! in grades K-8, and the New York City Scope and Sequence in science and social studies in grades K-8. The school transitioned from the Engage New York curriculum to Expeditionary Learning in grades 6-8 to better meet the needs of their students in writing and math.

- Across the grades, unit maps highlight curricula modifications, some of which are revising essential questions to include a focus on writing as well as academic vocabulary. Teachers include access points using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines and principles and varying levels of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions in their units and plans. In an English Language Arts (ELA) unit, student choice of activities and projects are included. In a Science unit on cell structure and function, the use of video and technology are included to explain how the different organelles in the cell are connected.

- In order to support the high percentage of students including those English language learners and students with disabilities, who are performing below grade level in English Language Arts and math while also addressing the instructional shifts, in specific, staircase of complexity, teachers include tiered tasks, flexible groups of students based on data, use of graphic organizers, manipulatives, and other supports to address varied learning styles.

- In an effort to be strategic and ensure all students, including the highest performing students have access to the curricula the school has purchased a centralized curriculum mapping program management system.
Findings
The school is developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress. Teachers checking for understanding and student self-assessment are inconsistent practices across classrooms.

Impact
Inconsistent monitoring of student understanding limits teachers’ abilities to adjust instruction effectively to meet all students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence
- As evidenced in some classrooms, teachers are checking for understanding using a “thumbs-up” or “thumbs-down” technique, however, some students who gave a “thumbs-up” sign to indicate they understood the task, did not have a clear understanding based on review of their work. In one class, students self-assessed their understanding by placing a green, yellow, or red cube on their desk to communicate to the teacher whether they needed additional support and all student work reviewed connected with the colored cube on their desk.

- The school uses Fountas and Pinnell running records at designated benchmarks throughout the year. They then collate and graph the data by class and grade. In addition, teachers administer on-demand writing prompts and Ready Gen end of unit performance based assessments in math and literacy. The school leadership is working with teachers to deeply understand the analysis process and how it will inform their individual teaching practice and impact student performance.

- The specificity in what students are assessed varies across the school. Students in some math classes were given exit tickets with either one or two tasks to assess their learning on the day’s lesson. One exit ticket asked students to identify the slope and y-intercept for the equation y+200-8x used to represent this function based on the information that, “A storm moves at a rate of 8 miles per hour. It is 200 miles away from Freeport and headed directly for this town.” Students in a social studies class received an exit ticket instructing them to explain what they had learned about the day’s lesson and to write one question that they had about the lesson.
Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures allow teachers a voice in key decision-making across the school.

Impact
Collaborative teacher teamwork supports standards-driven teaching and the attainment of school goals. Teachers play a role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence
- During a teacher team meeting, teachers reviewed Measures of Student Learning data using the Basic Protocol. Review of English Language Learner’s and students with disabilities’ work revealed that students were struggling with writing structure, particularly in their introductory and closing paragraphs in opinion essays. The team realized some of the ELL’s did not understand the concept of an opinion essay and that this part of the unit needed re-teaching. The team also noted the pacing calendar and Ready Gen curricula needed to be adjusted to include accommodations for addressing the learning gaps in opinion writing.

- Grade leaders meet with school leadership every Tuesday and present their ideas to the administration. Subject area teachers requested that in addition to their grade team meetings that they have meetings with their content area colleagues across grades in order to better support students and increase coherence and school leadership agreed.

- Teacher team agendas are shared with school leaders who also attend team meetings regularly. The principal meets with the new teacher team every Wednesday morning and engages teachers in different professional activities focused on the school’s instructional goals. Increasing rigor through questioning is a priority for the school and the new teacher team and principal read *Quality Questioning* by Jackie Acree Walsh in an effort to strengthen these teachers’ instructional capacity.