Quality Review Report

2015-2016

P.S. 175 City Island
K-8 School X175
200 City Island Avenue
Bronx
NY 10464

Principal: Amy Lipson Ellis

Date of review: May 24, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción
The School Context

P.S. 175 City Island is a K-8 school with 328 students from kindergarten through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 6% Asian, 8% Black, 30% Hispanic, and 54% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 14% students with disabilities. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.8%.

School Quality Criteria

### Instructional Core

**To what extent does the school...**

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<thead>
<tr>
<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>Celebration 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>Focus 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 Well Developed</td>
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### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

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<tr>
<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>Additional Findings Proficient</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

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<th>Area of:</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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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 Well Developed</td>
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Findings
Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized across a coherent curriculum and in academic tasks. Curricula and tasks are consistently refined based on student work and data.

Impact
As a result, all students have access to engaging curricula and demonstrate their thinking across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence
- Lesson plans from science, social studies, and English Language Arts (ELA) demonstrate tasks that require students to analyze informational text with a focus on researching. Students use close reading skills to develop critical thinking skills. In a grade 4 social studies task, students read historical texts and record different sides of the arguments about the legislative branch in order to analyze compromises made in creating Congress. In a grade 8 ELA unit, lessons incorporate the use of close reading skills to render the text so that students can see how simple lines in the text can lead to deep analysis of the author’s purpose. All units across grades use clear “I can” statements as learning objectives and inquiry questions that capture the thinking process and the product for the lesson.

- Aligned to the school’s instructional focus of fostering independent thinking and increasing student engagement and rigor, planning documents across grades and subjects evidenced that students meet Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards such as considering diverse perspectives and paraphrasing texts to gather points of agreement and controversy for class discussion. For example grade 7 reads, Day of Tears to understand the various perspectives of how slaves perceive slavery and psychologically process reconciling the institution of slavery with their own reality. In a grade 8 ELA unit the perspective of being an outsider is examined as students read across genres such as photographs, ballads, letters and poems to examine the hardships that many immigrants experienced in American society in the 1920’s.

- A review of student writing across the school revealed formulaic and repetitive writing in both short responses and extended responses. The school adopted a strategy called RACE which calls for students to restate, answer, cite evidence and explain. This strategy is used across grades and content. Writing maps reflect both the schoolwide data trends as well as the grade-focus for the student work. Supports for targeted students are provided through the use of leveled texts, differentiated tasks, tiered organizers, and through push-in teachers who use study bank materials which students self-select.

- An analysis of the constructive response on state exams revealed that students struggled with the skill of application. In order to ensure cohesiveness in the units they aligned the CMP3 project-based resources to GO Math! This has resulted in vertical alignment in math from kindergarten through grade 8.
Area of Focus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
Teaching practices across classrooms are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking.

Impact
While there is a focus on fostering independence, this has not yet led to high levels of student ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The schoolwide instructional goal is to provide students with both rigor and support to deepen thinking, foster independence and increase student engagement. For example, in a grade 4 math class learning about standard measurements, students compared items to each other to determine weight values. One student had a loaf of bread in her hand and had to compare that with a 5lb bag of sugar. She shared that the bag was equal to 2 loaves of bread. A basket at the table had customary measure sheets with weights listed and there were various other supports to ensure that students had the resources at hand to be cognitively engaged and independent. In grade 7 math class, students worked in various stations to solve real-world problems involving area, volume and surface area of composite figures such as quadrilaterals and cubes. One group worked on problem solving dimensions where one half inch equals 3.5 feet to determine the actual length and area of each room of an architectural blueprint.

- In one grade 8 class, students participated in a silent discussion. They gathered around a piece of paper where there was a quote from Elie Wiesel's Night in which he questions his faith. Students silently commented on the quote or on their classmates' comments. Students waited their turn to read and then write their comments. A review of the comments demonstrated higher-order thinking, such as “he has gained mental strength and feels enlightened.” While this activity fosters independence, it does not allow for the types of high-level discussion that lead to ownership. For example, though students were asked to share their thoughts, students did not have the opportunity drive the conversation in a way that allowed them to challenge each other or otherwise develop their point of view or deepen their thinking. The lesson plan reflected a brief share out of ideas.

- High levels of student thinking were also observed in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) grade 7 class where students who had returned from the Museum of Tolerance created their own graphic organizer that captured the thinking of the various slaves in the book Day of Tears. Students in this class were comparing the characters' thinking to the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle model. Students were able to discuss in small groups how a character's behavior represented the stages of grief. One group stated that Sampson is in the acceptance stage of grief because he has seen what life as a runaway slave is and realizes that some basic care and food allows him to continue to survive. However, this level of conversation was not see across all classes. In a grade 6 math class, students sat in stations and worked on different versions of mean, medium and mode. Students sat next to each other and waited for their peers to finish in order to compare answers.
# Additional Findings

<table>
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<tr>
<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
Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share. Distributed leadership structures are embedded across the school.

## Impact
Distributive leadership and effective teacher teamwork ensures that teachers play a vital role in key decisions across the school, resulting in collectively improving teacher practice and the mastery of goals for students.

## Supporting Evidence
- In a vertical teacher team meeting, teachers used a modified Atlas protocol to look at student work along with aspects of their own teacher work. Teachers recognized the student practice of providing opinions without directly citing evidence as the impact of their work. Teachers had asked students to paraphrase evidence instead of citing evidence directly because students were over-citing evidence. Teachers decided they would have students now cite evidence and state how it connected the text and their thesis. To ensure that both students and teachers focused this connection, teachers adjusted the unit and the peer and self-assessment rubric to reflect this new criterion. One new teacher stated that he realized that with proper feedback students can learn to correct their own mistakes. In addition, teachers shared that identifying misconceptions and teaching students to identify them had been a successful practice in math. A review of the math baseline data with the midline demonstrated that 264 students of the 301 who had been tested had made double digit gains that ranged from 12% to 70%.

- In a teacher team meeting, teachers shared that they have wide latitude in their work. They shared that they pick materials and resources for the curriculum. This work is led by two strong teacher coaches who lead the work of team which includes many new teachers. Teachers stated that as the sole school administrator, the principal relies on teachers to support alignment in the school. Teachers decide what to revise and the approach they will take. They look at trends in their practice and they plan professional development around it. The teachers have made adjustments such as ensuring that humanities classes have both an ELA focus and a content-based focus in social studies or science as well. This content-focus is embedded across grades to promote a new research-based approach to foster critical thinking.

- The school has a matrix called The Evolution of Our Work, which tracks the implementation and evaluation of goals across content and teacher development from 2005 until present day. This matrix follows the school goals and is modified by the principal and the school coach. This year, the principal created a school session during which teachers unpacked some of the goals for the school and provided the principal with feedback and suggestions for how the work should evolve. Post-its with teacher comments were observed on a wall-sized matrix in the principal’s office.
### Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment  
### Rating: Well Developed

#### Findings
Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

#### Impact
As a result, teachers and students receive meaningful feedback regarding student progress and teachers make effective instructional adjustments to ensure that all students demonstrate increased mastery.

#### Supporting Evidence
- School leaders and teachers create rubrics across grades and subjects. All the rubrics are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and to the Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) so that it represents a true portrait of student mastery in progression across each grade. In addition, rubrics are aligned to purpose. A short response rubric on a 2-point scale for a social studies project has criteria such as paraphrasing properly, pulling details from the text, and showing clear connections between topics. The student feedback states, “You drew some excellent connections” and includes a next step asking the student to put the details into own words to show a deeper understanding. Similarly, a grade 4 opinion-writing rubric demonstrates clear alignment to the MOSL traits by listing these as criteria. A document-based question rubric from grade 6 is completely aligned to the content and the Common Core and provides students with feedback telling the student that the position was clear and that a next step is to formalize the tone of the essay. A math rubric reflects not only the Common Core, but the math practices as well.

- In a student meeting, students shared portfolios that contained rubrics and teacher feedback. Student reflected on the teacher feedback and completed a tracking sheet that gave a description of the common assessment, included student reflections their area of strengths, area for improvement and a plan of action. Some students were able explain their goals in their own words and show how the use of the teacher feedback has led to improvement in their work. One student showed a mid-chapter test and said that after meeting with the teacher and incorporating the feedback, his grade went from an 88% to a 92%.

- Teachers use the results of common assessments to track student progress and adjust instruction to target at-risk students. For example, a comparison of the September MOSL writing baseline was compared to the May post-data results revealing that 100% of targeted students including students with individualized learning plans and English Language Learners in grades 3-8 showed improvement in their writing, with some students receiving a level 4 in the MOSL writing traits.

- Running records were tracked in September, December and again in April. Tracking this information allowed for adjustments to guided reading strategies and supports. While not all students met expectations, 100% of the 155 students tested made gains with 72 students, including students with individualized learning plans, exceeding expectations and their reading level.
Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness to families.

Impact
Teachers are supported through ongoing professional development to meet the high expectations for student achievement and there is a system of accountability to for those expectations. Parents and guardians understand their children’s progress and the school’s expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence
- The principal’s high expectations and system of accountability are present in continuous feedback loops. To ensure schoolwide coherence, the principal starts each day with a morning meeting with the school coaches to set the instructional lens for the day. The principal keeps a digital log on trends from observations and she shares this with the school coaches. A review of this log shows that the principal outlines areas of supports for teachers and provides focus for the coaches as well as gives them feedback and plans with them. Additionally, the principal uses a rubric aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching to provide curriculum maps with feedback. The principal has a series of checklists that she uses to provide teachers with feedback on classrooms environment, bulletin boards and student portfolios.

- Teachers attend both on-site and off-site training and professional development aligned to the school goals. Special education teachers have attended training at the district office. Two on-site school coaches observe their colleagues for patterns of need and create professional development aligned to their observations and school goals, such as lesson planning or fostering independence. A review of teacher observations demonstrates feedback aligned to the school goals such as, “Your lesson shows evidence of meeting our school goal of increasing the cohesiveness of unit and lesson planning” and “Providing students with a count-down of time while in groups encouraged independent thinking and learning, which is one of our school goals.” The school has many new teachers who felt that the professional development makes instructional and professional expectations clear and attainable. They shared that as new teachers they have come to rely on the coaches for support and mentoring.

- Parents shared that the staff communicates well with them regarding their children’s progress in school. Specifically, they mentioned communication during the Tuesday parent conference times when they receive phone calls on student achievement and teachers make themselves available for conferences. Parents stated that they receive progress reports and students bring homework along with rubrics that allows them to see the expectations for student work. Parents shared that they receive the school newsletter and that the newsletter shared information of upcoming units and work. They also stated that the newsletter contained “I-can statements.” Parents stated that the school has had students accepted into private schools and that is an indication to them that the school is rigorous. One parent shared a story of her son who was in special education and went to a private high school and was decertified from special education classes and put in an honors class. Parents stated that this is the proof that there are high expectations at the school.