The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

P.S. 161 Pedro Albizu Campos serves students in grade kindergarten through grade eight. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Rating</td>
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<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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 Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:** 3.4 High Expectations  
**Rating:** Well Developed

**Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for staff, and opportunities for professional learning and training allow teachers to create a culture of mutual accountability for meeting expectations. Teachers systematically provide feedback to groups of students that offers focused clear guidance.

**Impact**

The school’s five core beliefs articulate clear, high expectations to staff and ample opportunities are provided to teachers for training and planning alongside coaches, so that a culture of mutual accountability exists. Mentoring, electives, and high school clubs create a unique structure that helps students to own their educational experience and prepare for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders communicate clear expectations to teachers through a staff handbook, daily written communications in the office, emails, and through constant interactions between coaches, teachers, and administrators. The school is organized into two academies, for the lower and upper grades. Each academy receives weekly letters that detail expectations for professionalism connected to the school’s focus on their five core beliefs around instruction: higher order thinking and questioning, cognitively challenging tasks, differentiated or tiered instruction, use of formative assessments, and a focus on deep contextual understanding. The upper school weekly letter articulates expectations for communicating with families and data about teacher outreach to families across the middle school. The weekly letters also highlight professional learning that teachers engaged in as participants or hosts.

- While teachers are still working to bring some of the school’s five core beliefs to life in the classroom, teachers work together on aligning the curricula and instruction to these beliefs in cycles of learning with colleagues or one-on-one with a peer coach. The school has five teachers who teach for eight periods a week and spend the rest of their time coaching and supporting colleagues in meeting the school’s expectations or their own goals aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. A review of one peer coaching cycle documents showed a social studies teacher received feedback in planning aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching that reinforced schoolwide expectations and provided the teacher feedback on designing coherent instruction and engaging students in learning. The feedback bolstered the Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level of questions for students and provided guidance to allow students to take ownership of their learning.

- The school provides focused, effective guidance and supports for students, especially in the upper grades through mentoring and clubs that ensure that student groups, including high needs subgroups, get appropriate mentoring, experiences, and support to be aware of their talents and interests and are prepared for the next level. From as early as kindergarten, students are exposed to the arts, technology, and other electives. From grade seven, students are placed into one of eight mentoring groups aligned with their high school interests. Students are grouped together by their intent to apply to schools with screened academics, talents programs, or schools in the neighborhood. There is also mentoring for high-need subgroups and accelerated learners, such as, at-risk male students, and an Algebra Regents exam study group. Throughout classroom visits, students demonstrated debate skills, shared portfolios aligned to goals, and discussed the meetings and mentoring opportunities available to them as they prepare for the next level.
Area of Focus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings
The school’s curricula is becoming aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, and while teachers and school leaders have identified as areas for instructional shifts of focus, they have yet to be purposefully integrated into the curricula. Curricular planning reflects teachers working individually to provide learners with access to the curricula and cognitively engaging tasks, rather than collectively.

Impact
Students are engaging in curricula that are aligned to the Common Core with an inconsistent focus on the instructional shifts. While teachers are creating differentiated tasks or utilizing differentiated texts to provide access and cognitive challenge, planning for a diversity of learners lacks coherence.

Supporting Evidence

- The school curricula, aside from a few misaligned lesson plans, are aligned to the Common Core. There is growing coherence across grades in English Language Arts (ELA), where lessons and units are purposefully integrating the instructional shifts, ensuring that students cite evidence in text in discussions and writing tasks with varying levels of rigor. In lesson plans involving fiction and non-fiction texts, students were asked to cite evidence from the text as they explained the development of characters or wrote arguments about violence in video games. In math however, while the curricula across grades is aligned to the Common Core, the school’s focus on the instructional shift of students deep contextual knowledge was not evidence across the grades in the curriculum maps or lesson plans.

- Discussions and records of in their teacher team meetings across the content areas in middle and elementary grades demonstrate that teachers are talking about student strengths and weaknesses as demonstrated in assessments and student work, with some focus on students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). As teachers review common problems on assessments, they work independently to address issues in their own classrooms, but the planning and revisions are not making their way into the school’s curricula. Records of teacher teams and curricula planning documents, while both focused on student success are not integrated, leaving refinement of curricula separate from the curriculum maps in teacher meeting notes. Further, records, such as those of the upper grade math team, show that while teachers sit together to review data and develop new learning targets and activities to meet student need, they are not shared in a way in which teachers, current or future, can benefit from the refinement of the curricula and tasks. The record of their changes is more a demonstration of what the teacher used their planning time for, rather than purposeful collective revision of curricula.

- Writing across the content areas in interdisciplinary units was also described as a focus but was only observed in one eighth grade teacher created unit on mass incarceration and as an incomplete unit outline on the Harlem Renaissance. For both the completed and incomplete unit, while teaching points and alignment to the Common Core were clear, there was no planning of tasks within the unit to cognitively engage a diversity of learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities. There was also no observable focus on writing across the content areas in science or math, limiting the opportunities for students to engage in deep conceptual understanding in science or math.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings

Lessons structures and routines inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and opportunities for student thinking and participation.

Impact

Students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are limited in their ability to consistently demonstrate high levels of thinking in appropriately challenging work products. Lessons are not consistently paced so that students have access to tasks and discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- Scaffolds and purposeful questioning were present in some of the classrooms visited, but teacher dominated groups or pacing led to long mini-lessons and guided practice limited the opportunities for students to engage in activities that would allow them to demonstrate higher order thinking. In seven of ten of the classes visited, teachers directed questions to individual students rather than to the class or groups of students. Students did not have the opportunity to grapple with ideas during the lesson. In some instances, lessons were paced so that students could go off into groups to discuss challenging questions or tasks, but those groups were often dominated by a teacher or paraprofessional, rather than students. In a fifth grade math classroom, students worked with partners to analyze the sum of fractions in math games, with the teacher circulating to check for understanding and push student thinking in the groups but not leading their instruction. In this instance, students challenged one another and demonstrated their thinking through manipulatives, problem solving, and partnered discussions. This level of engagement and provision of multiple entry points was not the norm across the other classrooms visited.

- In a few classrooms, the tasks asked of the students or the scaffolds given to them limited what the students produced. While some students worked with differentiated tasks or texts on tablets on individualized or partnered tasks tailored to their learning needs, in others, the entire class was given technology-based tasks with no discussion or sharing of learning. Similarly, in a sixth grade ELA class, students were asked to find the main idea and details of texts that were differentiated, but the task and its accompanying graphic organizer prevented the students from engaging in higher order thinking skills and producing meaningful work products.

- Student-to-student discussions across classrooms reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation. In half of the classrooms visited, there was strong partnered and small group discussion, and strong student ownership of discussion in a visit to the middle school debate club, where students led highly structured group dialogue as they defended and refuted arguments by classmates. However, in other classes’ teacher domination of the lesson did not lead students to demonstrate thinking or participation in discussion.
## Additional Finding

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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

Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of rubrics and grading policies aligned with the curricula and ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Ongoing assessment and grading practices provide actionable feedback for students to guide their work and help teachers make effective adjustments to instruction in the classroom.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers consistently use or create rubrics and grading policies that are aligned to the school’s curricula, grading policy, and provide actionable feedback to students regarding the quality of their work. Four of the six student pieces shared during a meeting with students demonstrated use of rubrics, and all demonstrated clear next steps for students. Similarly, student work across grades and subjects consistently demonstrated rubric use, with teacher and peer glows and grows to support student achievement. In the lower and upper grades in math and science, rubrics accompanied student work during instruction, and for grading purposes. Student friendly rubrics in math for solving word problems provide feedback on demonstration of math knowledge, strategic knowledge and explanation of thinking. Teachers scored the rubric, and also provided students with a glow and grow. This practice was also seen in ELA and social studies classes, including a history lesson in a dual language class, where students received rubric-based feedback and glows and grows in Spanish on their writing about the Sumerians. There is also a growing use of an online document sharing site across the school. Teachers can provide feedback as students work and provides students access to teacher feedback on previous assignments with ease.

- Grading practices across the grades and content areas are aligned. The school has a clear grading policy across the school to measure student progress toward the Common Core Standards and academic and personal behaviors of college and career readiness such as participation, effort, and attendance. While different subject areas weigh classwork, homework, participation and other items slightly differently, they are consistent across the grades. Students also shared that in some classes, they have “Feedback Fridays” where they get to meet with their teacher to discuss progress; in others, students get feedback from teachers in daily conferences.

- In many classes, students also provided each other with actionable feedback in the form of glows and grows on sticky notes as observed in ELA classes across the grades. In a seventh grade writing class, students provided each other with feedback on their literary essays. For example, a student wrote to another, “I love the way you develop your thoughts and points to support your big idea. Next time, look over your work for mistakes. Re-reading really helps.” In a lower grade writing class, students use a peer compliment sheet to provide positive feedback to their class mates about their personal narratives, as observed in a piece of student writing about his brother.

- In seven of the nine classrooms visited, teachers checked for understanding, usually taking conference notes on student learning, confusion and clarifications provided. In a few classrooms, teachers conducted whole class, mid-lesson check-ins to clarify student thinking; the others, teachers conferred with students and used questioning to make on the spot adjustments.
**Additional Finding**

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders and instructional coaches have an effective system in place that supports teacher development with effective feedback and next steps from frequent classroom observation cycles. Clearly articulated feedback to teachers based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* accurately captures strengths and next steps supporting teacher development.

**Impact**

School leaders and instructional coaches make informed decisions and provide analysis of feedback to staff clearly setting out the expectations for practice, assignment, and retention thereby promoting the professional growth of teachers.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and instructional coaches support all teachers, including those new to the profession, with frequent cycles of observation and support on formal improvement plans. The school has recently had a decrease in the number of administrators, which has created new challenges and structures for support. The principal and two assistant principals conduct observations in four cycles, splitting the observation and support of teachers by academy, while also ensuring that the principal is able to provide support to new teachers and teachers on professional improvement plans. The school has five teachers who serve as part-time instructional coaches, and external coaches from partners such as Generation Ready, Teachers College, and Southern Cross Consultancy also support teachers through individualized cycles of observation that in turn promotes the professional growth of teachers.

- School administrators provide teachers with clear feedback that captures strengths, and provides glows and grows to offer specificity in next steps, in conversation after the classroom observation, and in writing. Observation records for a lower grade special educator demonstrated praise for how the teacher differentiated the lesson for individual learners, and provided next steps that connect to the school's expectations for student-to-student discussions and formative assessment in the lesson. This clarity of successful classroom practice and clear next steps was typical of feedback shared with teachers from all of the school's administrators. At the time of the review, all of the teachers had been observed twice, and several teachers noted that feedback after observations was quick, and that administrators always stopped back by to check in on new strategies and next steps discussed, whether formally or informally.

- Observation records for another teacher on a formal improvement plan show strengths and next steps focused on the teacher's use of the workshop model, with clear guidance on how to implement guided practice so that students make the connection between teacher modeling and independent practice. Coaching records also demonstrate that a school-based coach continues to support the teacher in developing their lessons and implementation of the workshop model, articulating clear expectations for practice and supporting the teacher by providing written feedback to lesson plans through an online document sharing site. Internal and external coaches are assigned groups of teachers to support in cycles, either by teacher interest, administrator directive, or content support needed. Every teacher receives coaching at some point in the year, with frequency based on teacher need, such as Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) practices, content, or making modifications.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based teams that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributive leadership structures include teacher team facilitators, grade leaders, and instructional coaches ensuring teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Impact

Teacher collaborations are strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Across the school, teachers have leadership roles that give teachers a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The majority of teachers participate in inquiry-based, professional collaborations that are focused on the Common Core, teacher practices, and student assessment data. Teachers work together in grade or content area teams, with instructional coaches and other teachers also working on a vertical team to reflect on teacher practices and curricula. Teachers work together on teams to review common assessment data, discuss instructional practices, and plan instruction for their respective students. For example, a fourth grade teacher team notes reflect a focus on student use of the bar model math strategy, with a review of student work and a teacher modified exemplar to support their understanding of the strategy. Similarly, an upper grade ELA team is focused on student progress in the writing cycle with a focus on student understanding of the revision process. Teachers reviewed student work and chose a student to focus on in deepening teacher understanding of student thinking about the writing cycle, leading to sharing of teacher practices in teaching writing.

- Each grade and content area team has facilitators that guide the work of the team and ensure that the team's work follows the use of protocols and adheres to their goals. The facilitator also ensures that team notes are kept in an online document sharing site, and serves as a liaison between the team and the school administrators. The team facilitators also gather to share areas of focus, successes, challenges, and norm the feedback that they give and receive from teams. The facilitators also discuss whether the instructional or pedagogical strategies of focus of the teams are being implemented with fidelity and are successful, with an eye toward spreading practices schoolwide.

- Grade level teams self-select grade leaders who also serve as a liaison between the grade and the school's leaders. Grade leaders also serve as mentors to teachers that are new to the school or new to the profession alongside instructional coaches. Several of the grade leaders have just completed school leadership programs and are leading new work in the school around project-based learning. The school's five instructional coaches all split their time between teaching classes and taking on leadership roles such as, providing data support to teachers and teams, monitoring professional learning, and collaboratively planning with new teachers or teachers in need of support, demonstrating their key role in supporting the development of teachers, leading professional learning and setting expectations for teachers for instructional planning.