

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	661500000
District Name:	Peekskill City School District
School Name:	Hillcrest Elementary School
School Address:	4 Horton Drive Peekskill, NY
School leader:	Michelle Zernone
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year 1) - Focused
Area of Identification:	English Language Arts - Students with Disabilities; English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Review:	December 19 and 20, 2011

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

"The mission of the Peekskill City School District is to:

- educate students in a caring, inspiring environment characterized by a spirit of excellence and high expectations;
- prepare graduates to meet or exceed state standards;
- graduate students who respect and appreciate cultural diversity;
- prepare students to pursue adult lives as contributing citizens of our local and global community."

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The staff have a good rapport with students and are responsive to parents and families.
- School staff demonstrate concern about student achievement and seem willing to embrace change.
- Parents and families are involved in the school and eager to participate.
- The school leader is energetic and enthusiastic in supporting change efforts.
- Students are generally well-behaved and appreciate the efforts of their teachers.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- There is inconsistent use of formative assessments to modify or differentiate instruction. Informal formative assessments, e.g., frequent checks for understanding, are not uniformly used across classrooms to monitor student learning.
- The school leader has begun requiring teachers to review multiple data points and develop individualized learning plans for students identified as “at-risk.” This data portfolio process is new and requires additional support for classroom teachers.
- Staff and the school leader value the Fountas and Pinnell assessment, although some classroom teachers are concerned about time, management, and validity in administering the assessment in the classroom setting.
- Student data are not easily available to teachers or specialists.
- The New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSELAT) data are not being shared with classroom teachers.
- Aside from the NYSELAT, there is no specific data being collected to measure ongoing language and content development growth for English language learners (ELLs).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A systematic process of assessment should be established and implemented schoolwide. This process should include specific formative, interim, and summative assessments as well as an assessment calendar to ensure that all students are progress-monitored on a regular and consistent basis. Professional Development (PD) and on-going support should be provided to staff to connect student data with instructional practice.
- The staff should receive PD, including job-embedded coaching, on the use of formative assessment.
- The staff should receive direct support in data compilation and analysis. More specifically, PD on connecting student performance data with instructional practice would be helpful in support of the data portfolio process.
- PD should be provided for the effective management of classrooms so that the Fountas and Pinnell assessment can be administered by classroom teachers effectively in an ongoing and integrated way.
- Teachers, including co-teachers and specialists, should have access to instructionally relevant student data.

- The school should focus on looking at the various types of data collected for ELLs to determine program effectiveness in promoting language and content growth in English as a Second Language (ESL) and dual language classrooms.
- A similar effort related to data analysis and program review should be undertaken for programs used for special populations.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- Teachers and the school leader value leveled texts and use these for differentiation.
- Students report that they feel generally safe at school, although there are problems on some buses and concerns related to having other students use their space and materials as a result of departmentalized teaching (i.e., students returning to a desk occupied by another student).
- Teachers report a lack of clarity about discipline policies and uncertainty about which infractions warrant office referrals.
- The furniture/seating arrangements in several classrooms resulted in the teacher focused on and interacting with a few rather than most students.
- In several classrooms, the reviewers noted that the teacher did not move around the room or create proximity to students to engage their attention.
- The current model of special education service delivery does not allow students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum. Students with disabilities are not integrated during the English language arts (ELA) block. Teachers who teach ELA and social studies have limited time with students with disabilities, as students are pulled out for 90 minutes each day. This applies even to students with integrated co-teaching on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- Curriculum maps are not being used to plan for ESL or dual language instruction. There is a need to ensure that ESL instruction is aligned with the P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Although content objectives were visible in most classrooms, language objectives were not visible in any classroom.
- Lack of specific, pertinent, District curriculum limits the ability of teachers to collaborate within or between grades and challenges specialists in their efforts to support learning across the curriculum.
- Pulling out students from multiple subjects and classes hampers the ability of ESL teachers to schedule and plan for targeted language instruction. In addition, these students are missing content area instruction, e.g., mathematics, science, and social studies, during the day. The school is actively engaged in PD regarding the CCLS; however, the curricula are not aligned with the CCLS. Curriculum maps will be revised in the spring.

- Clearly stated learning objectives are inconsistently applied. In many classrooms visited, the review team observed that the posted objective did not directly relate to the lesson presented.
- There is a lack of fidelity in the implementation of the dual language program, i.e., the use of language switching was observed. There was little evidence of instructional strategies being used to make language and content accessible to students of varying language backgrounds.
- A schoolwide grading policy exists, but there are no schoolwide criteria or rubric for grading.
- No schoolwide writing assessments were in evidence.
- Reading and writing instruction in the classrooms is inconsistent.
- In classrooms visited during the review, the review team noted that several classes appeared to lack lesson plans that included a variety and balance of student-centered instructional strategies to accommodate different learning styles and afford young learners the opportunity to participate in more active learning experiences. Collaborative learning structures were not observed.
- Lesson plans also lacked evidence of real world applications or hands on activities to motivate and engage students and bring the content to life.
- Direct, large group instruction and a tendency to attempt to sustain a question and answer format for much of the period resulted in a general lack of student engagement. The tendency was for teachers to interact most with the students who raised their hands most often, while significant numbers of students remained disengaged or inattentive to the lesson.
- Teacher' use of questioning strategies was uneven. In some classes, teachers asked higher order 'why' and 'how' questions, while in other classrooms questions were based on factual recall or repetition of material students had either on a worksheet or in a text.
- There was little evidence of differentiated instruction noted in classrooms visited by the review team. Students with disabilities and ELLs did not consistently participate in specially designed instruction in alignment with their identified needs. There was also little evidence of intentional instructional grouping or other strategies to support or challenge students who were either struggling or demonstrating ease with the material.
- There was little evidence of technology integration. One class visited had a SMART Board, but it was used in the same manner as an overhead projector.
- In classrooms visited during the review, the instruction was not always rigorous or engaging. There was insufficient application of higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving, and project-based learning.
- In general, there was an apparent lack of articulation, communication, consistency or opportunities for collaboration between or among teachers within the school or across schools. It appeared that this kind of professional communication, while deemed valuable by staff members, was not systematic.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There should be a follow-up conversation regarding the recently implemented flow chart for student discipline.
- Teachers should be provided with PD to expand management strategies, specifically those to address student side conversation and other distracting behaviors.
- The literacy block should be restructured to ensure students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are provided with appropriate support through differentiated instruction.
- Curriculum should be aligned with the CCLS and steps taken to ensure rigor and articulation (including clearly defined instructional objectives) across grades and between grades and schools. The staff should continue to study the CCLS and revise curriculum maps so that they are standards-aligned rather than textbook-driven. All students, including students with disabilities and ELLs, should have access to CCLS-aligned curriculum.
- The Committee on Special Education (CSE) should carefully review each child's needs and create IEPs that address the child's learning needs. There should be a direct match between the language of the IEP and the instructional support being provided.
- The staff should receive focused PD on the importance of creating and using meaningful learning objectives. This should include evidence-based methods specifically designed for ELLs.
- Within ELA classrooms, there should be general and consistent expectations across classes and grade levels with regard to reader response journals, note taking strategies, practice with research steps and a coherent and realistic grammar usage and vocabulary building program. Ensuring that teachers are increasingly familiar with ELA CCLS and applying the shifts inherent in those standards is important going forward.
- Identification of quick, but effective, formative assessment strategies, e.g., White Boards and exit cards, and how to use them to inform instructional decision-making should be shared with teachers. Once these formative assessment strategies are employed, summative classroom tests should be decreased.
- To improve instruction to students with diverse learning needs, the staff should receive on-going PD on differentiated instruction and student engagement, including higher-order thinking and questioning and authentic learning.
- Staff should have PD to increase their capacity to integrate technology, including the use of interactive white boards.
- Research-based practices, found to be effective with ELLs in each language strand (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), should be identified and implemented.

- Lessons should be delivered that use various instructional modes and opportunities for students to work collaboratively and independently.
- Vocabulary, grammar, and content should be taught in meaningful ways and scaffolded based on the language proficiency level of the students to increase comprehension and competency in literacy for ELLs. Teachers should provide many nonverbal clues, i.e., pictures, objects, demonstrations, gestures, and intonation cues to beginner and intermediate language learners. As competency develops, other strategies should include building language using graphic organizers and hands-on learning opportunities.
- On-going PD should be provided in support of co-teaching instruction.
- Scheduling should be revised to provide for consistent collaborative planning to support effective co-teaching and provide opportunities for articulation of the curriculum across and within grade levels.
- Opportunities for teachers to share their strengths and expertise, including classroom visits, volunteer videotaping, workshops, and Superintendent’s conference days that highlight “Teachers Teaching Teachers” should be provided.
- Another area of focus should be formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to systemically bring teachers within the District together to increase the articulation and coherence of curriculum.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- The School Leadership Team (SLT) meets regularly and was focused at the time of the visit on developing the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP).
- Teachers have experienced many leadership changes and feel as though the instructional program has suffered as a result of multiple changes in leadership, style, and direction.
- Teachers are seeking a clear vision of literacy instruction and an opportunity to collaborate to realize it.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- After the CEP is completed, the focus of the SLT should shift from plan development to implementation.
- A shared leadership model fully committed to taking the steps necessary to move the school forward should enhance and sustain school improvement efforts.
- The role of the SLT should be to ensure implementation of the CEP to support shared leadership and sustain long-term change efforts.
- A strategic plan should be put in place to guide the focused and comprehensive implementation of a schoolwide vision for literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

- PD aligned with a school and District vision of literacy instruction should be provided that includes practical guidelines for classroom implementation and monitoring student success.
- Curriculum mapping should be undertaken in concert with the development of a District-wide curriculum map.
- The SLT should develop mechanisms for communication with staff and parents/families.
- Strategies for tapping expertise within the school should be developed.
- Special education and ELL staff should be included in the SLT.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- The school master schedule does not support common planning time, which hampers effective co-teaching and data-driven instruction.
- The District has recently begun discussions surrounding Response to Intervention (RtI). At this time, there is no RtI system in place, nor is there a system in place to identify and support struggling students.
- The school is not implementing the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model of schoolwide behavioral management with fidelity. While many individuals were able to describe the premise of the program, few were able to provide specific details regarding behavioral expectations. The implementation of the PBIS model in individual classrooms is highly inconsistent, resulting in highly varied classroom management systems. There is also no evidence that the PBIS team is using data to make decisions and program adjustments. There is a strong focus on the “rewards” aspects of the PBIS model, with little emphasis on the reflective or data analysis component.
- There is little evidence of clear routines being implemented in the classrooms to increase instructional time and reduce behavioral correction.
- The dual language and ESL programs are not well-defined. Models are inconsistent between grade levels and are not consistent with evidence-based models for ELLs.
- The implementation of the 90-minute ELA block is inconsistent across classrooms.
- Teachers consistently cite a reduction in support for collaborative co-teaching as challenging to the success of the program.
- At the time of the review there was no supplemental extended day or extended year programs for ELLs or for struggling students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The master schedule should be reviewed and revised to facilitate common planning and team meetings during which student learning data should be reviewed. Schedules should be revised to provide for consistent collaborative planning to support effective co-teaching and articulation of the curriculum across and within grade levels.
- Staff should receive on-going PD and support for the implementation of the PBIS model with fidelity. The PBIS team should regularly review schoolwide behavioral data to modify behavioral processes and expectations.
- PD should include an emphasis on the importance of best strategies for instruction and consistency in classroom routines as means of increasing instructional time.
- Dual language and ESL programs should have clearly defined entrance and exit criteria. Additionally, the two programs should be defined and designed based upon evidence-supported best models of instruction for ELLs.
- The literacy block should be restructured to ensure students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are provided with appropriate support through differentiated instruction.
- PD should include job-embedded classroom coaching and a focus on restructuring of the ELA program to maximize instructional impact.
- The District and school should develop and implement RtI. At the school level, a process for identifying and supporting struggling students should be refined to include regular meeting times, protocols for reviewing students, identified roles and responsibilities for staff and specific criteria for students' entering/exiting services.
- Opportunities to provide extended-day and year academic support to students should be developed.
- All stakeholders should be made aware of available resources for ELLs and students with disabilities.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- PD has been provided by the school leader on the CCLS and guided reading.
- There is no evidence of a system for identifying PD needs.
- PD is not differentiated.
- No PD has been provided on instructional strategies, technology, or differentiation.

- Teachers seek out expertise from colleagues, but have no formal process for knowing what talents colleagues have or are able to share.
- Team leaders have a range of expertise, but no formal training in PD.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- PD should be aligned with the CEP and strategic plan to support the focused and comprehensive implementation of a schoolwide vision for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- A needs assessment should be conducted to determine the differentiated needs and strengths of the staff to inform the provision of PD.
- The District should provide systematic, needs-driven, and ongoing PD opportunities to all educators focusing on fundamentals of instructional strategies, including differentiated instruction to support them in addressing the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs. The Plan should also include opportunities for teachers to share their expertise. Staff should be provided with PD to support differentiated instruction, including effective, research-based strategies for promoting literacy achievement for ELLs and students with disabilities across all literacy strands.
- PD opportunities should enable teachers to enhance their repertoires of instructional strategies to increase student engagement and promote higher order, more authentic learning. PD should include practical strategies for implementation, e.g., “make and take” and ongoing coaching and facilitation.
- Instructional staff should be knowledgeable of the requirements to support the success of ELLs and students with disabilities.
- PLCs should be developed and supported and focus on evidence-based strategies for school improvement.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- Technology in the school is inadequate to maximize student engagement and support "21st Century" learning techniques.
- Leveled texts in Spanish are not well-matched with the English texts, resulting in inadequate materials readily available for ELLs.
- The librarian is in the school only every three weeks. The school leader has reviewed the literature in the library and removed outdated materials. In addition, she has sought out sources for additional literature and materials.
- Several classrooms were hot, and in one the loud drone of the radiator prevented students from hearing what the teacher or their classmates were saying.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The District-wide technology plan should be reviewed to ensure that adequate technology resources are provided to the school.
- Adequate resources should be provided to ensure that materials, i.e., leveled texts in Spanish, are readily available for all students.

PART 4: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in the report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning, and the development of the CEP for school year 2012-13. The school should also continue its efforts in the implementation of the following Regents Reform Agenda initiatives: P-12 CCLS, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.