

STRENGTHENING TEACHER PRACTICE = STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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2022 Cahn Distinguished Principals Cohort

ABSTRACT

At PS 165, we believe that strengthening teacher practice directly impacts student achievement. We emphasize a growth mindset in both our students and staff and wholeheartedly believe that all kids can. PS 165 is a true community school with a variety of programs to meet the needs of our learners and a community that is truly reflective of the surrounding New York City demographics.

With a diverse range of learning needs in the student population, it's imperative that our teachers are well versed in differentiating instruction based on students' needs. This has led to our focus of strengthening their teacher practice in teaching small group instruction with an emphasis on knowing "What" to teach and "How" to teach it in the most effective and efficient way. By capitalizing on the culture of lifelong learning that we have built within our staff and providing leadership opportunities for teachers, we were able to provide opportunities for professional development, peer intervisitation, and data analysis in order to have a positive impact on the reading proficiency of the students at PS 165.

INTRODUCTION

Our Cahn project focused on building capacity and providing professional development opportunities for teachers in order to positively impact student reading proficiency. As we will further describe below, we chose to focus on this project after reviewing our reading proficiency data, formally and informally observing teachers' small group reading instruction, and reviewing feedback from our school Instructional Leadership Team. Our project follows our year-long process of teacher development and the impact it had on literacy proficiency in the school.

PS 165 is a thriving pre-K through 5th grade elementary school that serves 425 students and meets the needs of all students through different academic programs. Each grade level in kindergarten through 5th grade consists of one class of each of the following programs; Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) with a 40/60 ratio of students with IEPs and general education students, Dual Language Spanish (DL) with instruction taking place in English/Spanish on alternating days, and Gifted and Talented (G&T) which is a district-wide program with selection criteria. PS 165 also has two 12:1:1 (12 students:1 teacher: 1 paraprofessional) special education bridge classes. One for kindergarten through 2nd grade students and another for 3rd through 5th grade students.

PS 165 is a title one school that has a culturally diverse community with a student population that identifies as 53% Hispanic or LatinX, 18% Black, 6% Asian, and 22% White. 12% of our students are English Language Learners, 18% are Students with IEPs and 12% are Housing Insecure. Since September 2022, PS 165 has also welcomed an increased number of migrant families seeking asylum and living in temporary housing.

PS 165 is a school where all learners are valued, loved, and empowered. For the last 8 years, PS 165 has been a Leader in Me school which emphasizes students' unique talents, fosters student leadership skills, and encourages students to find their voice through the process of learning the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Kids. All students in the school have leadership roles within their classrooms and then apply for leadership positions in

the greater school community such as tour guides, student lighthouse (student council), and event coordinators and facilitators. In June of 2022, PS 165 received the Leader in Me's Lighthouse School status, meaning it is a model or beacon for other schools, after undergoing a rigorous evaluation of culture, leadership, and academics.

Benchmark Data:

Each year, reading proficiency at PS 165 is measured schoolwide and tracked throughout the year utilizing running record assessment. Teachers in Kindergarten through 5th grade administer running records and submit data trackers in October, December, February, April, and June. Each class has a unique data tracker that indicates the following information about their class: (Appendix A)

- Individual student performance level (reading level)
- Growth they have made year to date
- Students who are below, approaching, on, or above grade level
- Percentage of students below, approaching, on, or above grade level

Proficiency is measured as the percentage of students either performing on or above grade level at each point in the year. The benchmarks change as the year progresses and students are expected to move an average of three reading levels each year in order to maintain reading on grade level.

In June 2022, we met with the Instructional Leadership Team which is composed of PS 165 administrators and instructional coaches to review the June 2022 reading proficiency data in order to plan for the 2022-2023 school year. The June 2022 reading proficiency data indicated the following percentages of students reading on or above grade level: (Appendix B & C)

- Kindergarten Reading Proficiency: 67.24%
- 1st Grade Reading Proficiency: 72.72%
- 2nd Grade Reading Proficiency: 64.00%
- 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency: 63.64%
- 4th Grade Reading Proficiency: 76.19%
- 5th Grade Reading Proficiency: 67.35%
- Kindergarten through 5th Grade Overall Reading Proficiency: 67.95%
 - o K-5 Overall % Below Grade Level: 25.32%
 - K-5 Overall % Approaching Grade Level: 6.73%
 - K-5 Overall % On Grade Level: 23.08%
 - K-5 Overall % Above Grade Level: 44.87%

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the Instructional Leadership Team meeting in June of 2022, the school reading proficiency data was reviewed by grade and overall as a school. The conversation also led into what was noticed across the school year in both formal and informal observations and noticing during coaching sessions and professional development that teachers had in fact been teaching small groups of learners during independent work time, however, there was trend that the teachers were not always clear in the delivery of the strategies they were

trying to teach and the teachers also had confusion and difficulty about how to choose what to teach to students who needed support. Teachers were not using explicit language during small group instruction, their models were not clear and transferable for students, the students themselves were not owning the strategy and able to explain it after the small group lesson, and students needed repeated practice.

As a team we realized that if we were to hone in on and focus on improving teacher practice in planning for and delivering small group instruction, that could have a positive impact on student reading proficiency rates because then students will receive high quality, differentiated instruction based on their individual needs.

The following questions arose as we began brainstorming how to address the problem of practice and its impact on student learning:

- How can we use our own staff members to leverage the work that needs to be done?
- Who in our school building had demonstrated promising practices in small group instruction?
- Who from outside of our staff can support us in this work? How can we strengthen the Teachers College Staff Development to align to our focus?
- How can we leverage the positive culture in the building to support this work?
- How can we capitalize on positive working relationships among staff members to further strengthen this work?
- How can we utilize the already established teams and teachers leaders to further support our focus?

The team determined that we would set a goal of increasing our schoolwide reading proficiency by 3% by June 2023. In order to make this growth, we decided to focus on professional development and building teacher pedagogy around determining what to teach during small group instruction and how to effectively teach it. We created a process for change timeline and set goals in order plan for the year ahead:

- Alignment to school literacy proficiency goal based on reading data
- Meet with outside staff developers to share our goals & focus for the year
- Create a year-long PD plan centered around the goal
- Year-long assessment calendar
- Expectation norming
- Data analysis with grade teams
- Observations & feedback in the moment
- Coaching cycles
- Intervisitation
- Instructional Leadership Team reviews & monitors whole school data across the year

METHODS

Since our problem of practice became increasing reading proficiency through building teacher pedagogical knowledge, we knew we would have to have multiple avenues for providing professional development and that we had to triangulate the work we were doing so that it was all aligned. Instead of

professional development across the year that jumps from one subject/topic to another, we focused on small group instruction and tied in instructional coaching work, professional development sessions, staff development from Teachers College, and inter-visitations. Thankfully, in the last ten years the staff mindset on professional learning has gone from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, so buy-in for professional learning was not an issue. The staff all know that at PS 165 all staff members are constantly learning and growing and must be open to professional learning in order to positively impact their students.

On opening day of each school year, we, Principal Castellano and Assistant Principal Scanlon, lead an onboarding meeting for all staff in order to set our expectations and share our mission and vision for the school year. At the September 2022 onboarding, we shared with our staff that our priority focus for the 2022-2023 school year was, "Through professional development we will strengthen teacher capacity in utilizing student data to determine specific strategies to apply in their lesson planning for differentiated small group instruction, resulting in increased student proficiency." We also stated that the our instructional expectations for teachers included:

- Staff are expected to implement their learning from professional development opportunities.
- Lessons must be modified to meet the needs of the students in your class.
- Setting standards-based goals based on student data sets clear expectations for a student's
 instructional growth and determines the teaching focus areas for working with that student in small
 groups.
- It is expected that teachers set and monitor progress toward standards-based instructional goals for each student.
- Monitoring student progress occurs during small group instruction, conferring and through formative and summative assessments.
- All students are to be provided with access to high quality, equitable instruction.
 - High expectations for all students regardless of program or status (IEP, ELL, etc.)

One of the first literacy professional developments teachers and paraprofessionals attended during the 2022-2023 school year was titled, "Strengthening Literacy Small Groups: WHAT and HOW?" This professional development, led by our two instructional coaches, set clear expectations for what was expected during reading small groups. It taught teachers the small group structure (rally, explicit model, try, link), how to plan for small groups, and specifically how to choose "What" to teach (the skill that the student is working on) and "How" to explicitly teach it (the specific strategy students will learn to master the skill). (Appendix E) Teachers received guidance on which students benefit from which type of small group, knowledge around how to prioritize skills, toolkits that had a reading skills and strategies bank for reading, and a lesson plan template for literacy in small groups. The coaches also modeled how to make sure the small group lesson had a clear and concise model of the skill and strategy being taught.

About every 8 weeks across the school year (coinciding with the reading tracker data due dates and Acadience and MAP data dates), teachers met with their grade team and engaged with the instructional coaches to analyze their reading data, check in on student progress, and collaboratively plan for their literacy small groups. Instructional coaches modeled how to apply the strategies being taught, what it looks like and sounds like to teach strategic small groups, and then examples of additional reading strategies that would

support the skill being taught. Twice during the school year, teachers were also given two periods of small group planning time with their team and a coach so that the teachers could plan and create a bank of small group lessons collaboratively with feedback from the instructional coach.

Literacy staff development was also an integral part of our plan. Across the school year, each grade band, K-2 and 3-5 had six sessions with a staff developer from Teachers College. In early September 2022, the Instructional Leadership Team met with our K-2 and 3-5 staff developers to share the problem of practice and goals for the year. It was clearly articulated that the work they would do with each grade team included strengthening small group literacy instruction, modeling small groups, and observing teachers to give feedback on their small groups. In kindergarten through second grade, staff development was focused on phonics and decoding small group instruction, the decoding progression, and decoding assessment administration to monitor progress. For third through fifth grade, staff development was focused on prioritizing skills and strategies based on students' needs, teachers modeling explicit strategies clearly and concisely, and students being able to make and apply the strategies independently.

The PS 165 K-2 and 3-5 instructional coaches also engaged in coaching cycles with teachers identified by administration as needing additional support based on observations. When working 1:1 with those identified teachers, the cycle usually followed this cycle:

- 1. Meeting with the teacher to determine pedagogical needs and set goals
- 2. Coach models a small group for the teacher to observe in their classroom
- 3. Co-planning of a small group with the teacher for the teacher to deliver
- 4. Teacher delivers the co-planned small group lesson and receives feedback from the coach
- 5. Teacher independently plans and teaches a small group with feedback from the coach

This process helped to further support teachers who were either new to instructional work of the school or who needed additional practice and 1:1 guidance through the process of strengthening their small group instructional practices.

Another very impactful component of our work in strengthening small group instruction was conducting an intervisitation day for literacy small groups. (Appendix E) Since the culture at PS 165 is one of collaboration and celebration of each others' strengths, teachers were eager and excited to either model a small group for their peers or participate as an observer. Model teachers were chosen based on the promising practices they exhibited during small group observations and the instructional coaches worked with those teachers to provide feedback on their plans for the intervisitation lesson. Participants were chosen based on areas of need during observations or interest in the skill/strategy being taught by the model teacher. Each intervisitation was during one period (50 minutes) and followed the following structure:

- Pre-Intervisitation Meeting (10 minutes)
 - Set expectations for the observation.
 - Explain the focus for the small group intervisitation that period
 - What to look for and notice during the classroom visit
 - Explanation of note catcher
- Intervisitation (15 minutes)
 - Visit the model small group classroom

- Utilize the note catcher to take notes on teacher moves and student discourse
- Post-Observation Debrief (20 Minutes)
 - Group debrief and reflection
 - Teachers will revisit their notes and engage in group discussion:
 - What were the teacher moves?
 - What were students doing/saying (student agency)?
 - What do these observations make you think?
 - What questions do you have?
 - o Q & A with Model Teacher

The following notes were documented during the debrief and reflection portion of the literacy intervisitation:

- I'm eager to try the shared reading phonics-based small group with my students.
- In all the small groups observed, the What and the How was clear. Students were able to name and repeat what they were working on.
- Seeing teachers try different types of small groups made me feel like this was something I would like to try too and something I can do.
- Something I want to try in my classroom is a small vocabulary group for my English Language Learners.
- I want to try giving specific feedback to my students as they work in small groups.

Throughout the year, the focus remained on strengthening small group instructional practices through professional development opportunities and all teachers and staff understood the focus and importance of the goal.

RESULTS

Throughout the year, as with any project, challenges did arise. One challenge was that in addition to our internal running record assessments we complete across the year, there are many other assessments that are also required to be administered. This resulted in periods of time when teachers would have to administer assessments during independent work time instead of meeting with reading small groups. This was especially difficult during the end of September into early October, end of January into early February and end of May into June. The pause on small group instruction would last a week to two weeks depending on the grade level and assessments being administered, so reading progress momentum was sometimes affected.

Additionally, COVID continued to impact the school. Students were more frequently absent as parents were worried to send in their students with any symptoms and restrictions continued to require a minimum five days of isolation each time a student or teacher tested positive.

We were also planning to use the overall Danielson rating averages to demonstrate teacher growth in component areas as part of our results. The averages for the 2021-2022 school year are available through the DOE data portal, however, the 2022-2023 data averages are not yet available. This resulted in having to manually calculate the averages for each Danielson component by pulling each teacher's individual scores and then finding the average of each component overall.

The overall reading proficiency from June 2022 through June 2023 increased by 4.35% meaning we exceeded our 3% goal. Below is a breakdown of the overall data. The June 2023 reading proficiency data indicated the following percentages of students reading on or above grade level: (Appendix B & D)

• Kindergarten Reading Proficiency: 73.68%

• 1st Grade Reading Proficiency: 62.71%

• 2nd Grade Reading Proficiency: 67.44%

• 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency: 74.32%

• 4th Grade Reading Proficiency: 73.68%

• 5th Grade Reading Proficiency: 86.11%

• Kindergarten through 5th Grade Overall Reading Proficiency: 72.31% (Increase of 4.35%)

K-5 Overall % Below Grade Level: 18.89%

K-5 Overall % Approaching Grade Level: 9.45%

K-5 Overall % On Grade Level: 19.87%

K-5 Overall % Above Grade Level: 52.44%

In analyzing the data, almost every grade increased their reading proficiency from year to year with the exception of first and fourth grade. (Appendix B) We were also able to reduce the number of students reading below grade level by 6%.

Teacher practice, according to the Danielson Rubric and NYC DOE Advance rating system, was also positively impacted by the emphasis on improving teacher practice around small group instruction. Teacher overall ratings in Domain 1: Planning & Preparation, Domain 3: Instruction, and Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities increased from the 2021-2022 to the 2022-2023 school year. These Danielson domains were the most directly impacted by the professional development teachers engaged in around planning for small groups, delivery of small groups, analyzing data, and participating in the overall community. The Danielson scale runs from 1 being ineffective, 2 being developing, 3 being effective, and 4 being highly effective. Most noticeably, Danielson 4E: Growing and Developing Professionally grew from an average of 3.15 to an average of 3.45. Teachers truly took the practices they were learning in professional development and applied them to their practice. They were also eager to attend professional development and more engaged in all teams and activities in the school. Danielson component 3B: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques increased from 2.89 to 2.93, 3C: Engaging Students in Learning increased from 2.8 to 2.89, and 3D: Using Assessment in Instruction also increased from 2.73 to 2.84. (Appendix G & H)

As an Instructional Leadership Team, we have already identified our next steps to continue this legacy project and further increase reading proficiency at PS 165. We will continue the practices we have already implemented and include the following this 2023- 2024 school year. We are reconfiguring schedules to utilize special education teachers for intervention groups, expanding our Foundations After School intervention program, continuing professional development around decoding and phonics while also ensuring that there is a balance with comprehension instruction, beginning Heggerty phonemic awareness instruction in grades K-2, beginning Fundations instruction in grade 3, and closely monitoring the Decoding Assessment for all kindergarten and 1st graders. Finally, we also plan to keep records of commitment for teachers to help to

further hold them accountable for the goals they set for their instruction and pedagogy following professional development.

REFLECTIONS & FUTURE PLANS

Aracelis Castellano-Folkes

One of my leadership goals year to year is to strengthen the skills and knowledge of our teachers and staff because I believe that if we increase teacher knowledge we increase student proficiency. The Cahn work with Dr. Ellie around feedback was directly related to this goal and though I was versed in ways to give feedback, the activities where we had to role play scenarios was very helpful in developing tailored feedback for specific teachers. This was in coincidence with using the Dr. Perkins strengthsfinder surveys with our teachers. Knowing more about my staff's strengths allowed for me to weave in the ways to deliver feedback according to what we learned about how our staff works best. This impacted the teachers in that they were being heard and supported as well as further building their understanding of instructional expectations. This also led to teachers wanting to open their classrooms as labsites for colleagues to view best practices which allowed for an increase in coherent practice. The impact on students is the ultimate goal and it was evident.

My ally is our phenomenal Assistant Principal, Jessica Scanlon. We worked together to develop the plans for the school. She is a learner with a growth mindset and is highly invested in our school mission and vision. She was able to apply the learning acquired through our Cahn experiences to advance the strategic priorities of our school. She did this by organizing and leading teacher meetings and providing clear guidance to our instructional coaches as they prepared the professional learning plans. Our growth as a school has been possible through her support of my vision for PS 165 M.

Jessica Scanlon

It has been an honor to participate in the Cahn Fellowship. Over the course of the last year, I have expanded my leadership knowledge and learned a great deal about myself as a school leader. I most enjoyed the personality and leadership assessments that we took across the course of the fellowship. Many areas of strength emerged and it was very interesting to see how many of my leadership skills were complimentary to Principal Castellano's. The Adult Development work we engaged in with Dr. Ellie helped me to understand how to best give feedback to teachers based on their individual needs. I also enjoyed the work we did with Dr. Perkins around the Strengths Finder Assessment and we were even able to have him engage in the Strength Finder Assessment and Professional Development with our entire staff and 4th and 5th grade students. Our staff and students thoroughly enjoyed the experience and learned so much about their strengths and ways to compensate for the areas that were lower on the strength scale. Principal Castellano and I worked with Dr. Perkins in order to understand our overall staff's strengths and he was able to give us feedback about communicating effectively with them.

I can confidently say that I am an even more effective leader because of the high quality learning I received during the Cahn Fellowship experience. I want to thank Principal Aracelis Castellano-Folkes for

selecting me as her Ally and providing me with this amazing opportunity to strengthen my leadership skills and therefore positively impact PS 165. She has been an amazing thought partner and mentor for many years now, and I cannot thank her enough for her constant support, patience, and guidance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PS 165 Teachers & Staff: For their dedication, flexibility, and implementation of feedback that facilitated an increase in student academic proficiency. We have developed a truly supportive community and family at PS 165.

Jessica Scanlon, A.P and Cahn Ally: Thank you for strengthening the schoolwide vision and goals by developing schedules, analyzing data, and collaborating with stakeholders. Your leadership has been vital to our work.

Xaymara Rosado, I.A A.P: Thank you for always having creative ways of engaging our teachers and staff in professional learning and supporting them through the process.

Nilla Ingravallo, Instructional Coach: Thank you for sharing and modeling Instructional strategies and expertise with our staff to support our school vision.

Barbara McKeon and the Cahn Fellows Leadership Team: Thank you for providing high quality educational leadership opportunities for administrators. This has been an experience that neither one of us will forget and it was truly a pleasure to be a part of such an amazing group of leaders.

Fellow 2022-2023 Cahn Fellows & Allies: We truly appreciate the relationships we have built with inspirational leaders across the country and value the expertise that we were surrounded by.

Our Families: Omar, Jalena, Marko, and Madeline. Thank you for always supporting us in our career and understanding the importance of the work we do as school leaders.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Sample of Blank Third Grade Reading Tracker for 2022-2023 School Year

Class				Reading Level Tracker 2022-2023						
(Alphabetical Order) Last Name	First Name	Indicate ELL or IEP	Equity Action Plan	June 2022 Level	Oct. Level 10/7/22 FORMAL	Dec. Level 12/16/22 FORMAL	Feb. Level 2/10/23 FORMAL	April Level 4/28/23 FORMAL	June Level 6/16/23	Reading Level Growth YTD
										Ì
									Total	

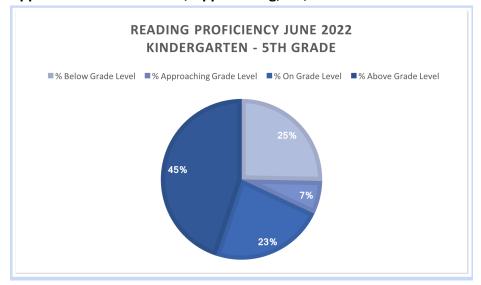
# of students in that a	entages use the following equati section + total # of students = % s BGL + 25 total students in class	of Class			Progres	s Tracke _ Class	r 2022-2023 —			
	October 2022		December 2022		February 2023		April 2023		June 2023	
	Full Name	Reading Level	Full Name	Reading Level	Full Name	Reading Level	Full Name	Reading Level	Full Name	Readin Level
Below Grade Level	Level K or Below		Level L or Below		Level L or Below		Level M or Below		Level N or Below	
Level	% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =	
Approaching Grade Level	Level L		Level M		Level M/N		Level N		Level O	
	% of Class = Level M/N		% of Class = Level N/O		% of Class = Level 0		% of Class =		% of Class =	
On Grade Level										
	% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =	
Above Grade Level	Level O or Above		Level P or Above		Level P or Above		Level P or Above		Level Q or Above	
	% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =		% of Class =	

Appendix B: PS 165 June 2022 & June 2023 Reading Proficiency Data

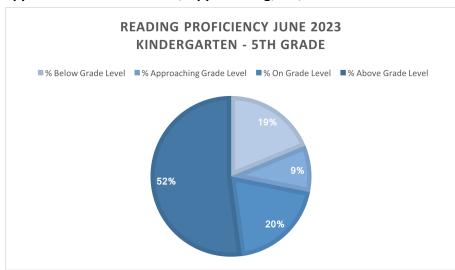
PS 165 June 2022 & June 2023 Reading Proficiency

Grade Level	June 2022 Proficiency Rate	June 2023 Proficiency Rate		
Kindergarten	67.24%	73.68%		
1st Grade	72.72%	62.71%		
2nd Grade	64.00%	67.44%		
3rd Grade	63.64%	74.32%		
4th Grade	76.19%	73.68%		
5th Grade	67.35%	86.11%		
Elementary K-5	June 2022 Proficiency Rate	June 2023 Proficiency Rate		
K-5	67.95%	72.31%		

Appendix C: Overall Below, Approaching, On, and Above Grade Level Reading Proficiency June 2022



Appendix D: Overall Below, Approaching, On, and Above Grade Level Reading Proficiency June 2023



Appendix E: Slides from Presentation for Strengthening & Morning Small Group Expectations



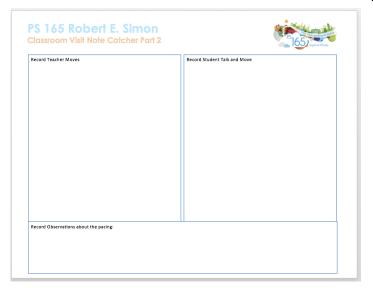
Appendix F: Intervisitation Documents: Intervisitation Plan, Note Catcher, & Reflection Page

P.S. 165 Teacher Collaboration: Intervisitation Plan

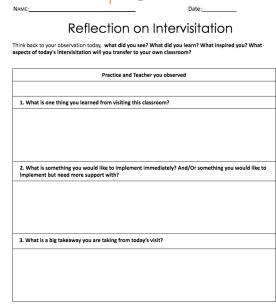
Domain 2 (Capacity Building and Collaboration)

Day 1: Literacy

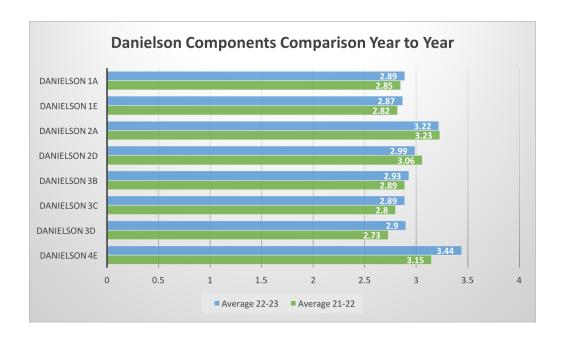
Lens	ICT Strategy Small Groups	High Expectations for All	Literacy Foundational Skills Small Group Shared Reading	Supporting ENL Students
Teacher Showcased	Ms. La Guardia /Frankel	PATLIAS	DIAMOND	DE LA CRUZ
Showcased Practice	ICT models	Differentiating for Success	Small Group Reading	Supporting ELL's and New Arrivals
Teachers that will visit	Cordero Stone/Phillips	Medina Stone Frankel Pearce	Ferrer Valerio Medina Berstein Pearce	Ferrer Valerio Pearce







Appendix G: Danielson Overall Rating Averages for Domain 3 & 4 2021-2022 Versus 2022-2023



Appendix H: Danielson Rated Components NYC Department of Education

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation	Domain 2: The Classroom Environment
1a Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy p 4	2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport p 8
Knowledge of content and the structure of the discipline Knowledge of prerequisite relationships Knowledge of content-related pedagogy	Teacher interactions with students, including both words and actions Student interactions with other students, including both words and actions
1e: Designing Coherent Instruction p 6	2d: Managing Student Behavior p 10
 Learning activities Instructional materials and resources Instructional groups Lesson and unit structure 	Expectations Monitoring of student behavior Response to student misbehavior
Domain 3: Instruction	Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities
3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques p 12	4e: Growing and Developing Professionally p 18
Quality of questions/promptsDiscussion techniquesStudent participation	Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skill Receptivity to feedback from colleagues Service to the profession
3c: Engaging Students in Learning p 14	
 Activities and assignments Grouping of students Instructional materials and resources Structure and pacing 	
3d: Using Assessment in Instruction p 16	1
Assessment criteria Monitoring of student learning Feedback to students Student self-assessment and monitoring of progress	