

## Citywide Instructional Expectations Case Study

### Guiding Questions

#### Overview

The 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations help schools reflect upon and refine their practice in order to prepare all students to graduate college and career ready. One strategy for reflecting on practice is to examine how other schools have approached their work. These case studies offer insights on how teachers, school leaders and field support staff make decisions and engage stakeholders to develop school-wide practices to strengthen student achievement.

Case study schools have strong practices in building coherence among their culture, structures, and instructional core. The school communities voluntarily and generously shared their work in order to develop case studies that:

- Reflect authentic practice in a New York City school
- Include resources or artifacts from the school
- Connect to one or more of the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations components: Knowledge of Students, Instructional Focus, Collaborative Professional Learning

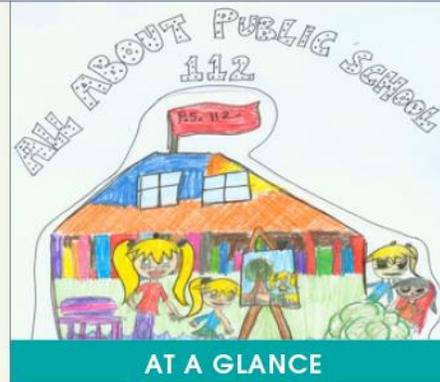
#### Guiding Questions: Instructional Focus

*From the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations:* An instructional focus is a school-determined priority that integrates multiple initiatives into a cohesive vision for strengthening student achievement. It is rooted in the school's needs and has a direct and evident impact on classroom practice. An instructional focus is developed after examining multiple sources of information, including the strengths and needs of students. It brings cohesion to a school's goal-setting process, comprehensive education plan, teacher and administrator development goals, and decisions about resource allocation. It is emphasized throughout the work of the school, including in school-wide professional development plans, the observation and feedback cycle, and communication with families.

1. What information in this case study suggests how the instructional focus is embedded in:
  - Structures
  - Professional Learning
  - Resources
  - School Culture
  - Classroom Practices
2. How has this school's instructional focus impacted students?
3. What decisions did the school leader make to support implementation of an instructional focus?
4. What questions does this study raise? What data or evidence would you like to add?
5. What practices does your school have in place that support the implementation of the instructional focus?
6. What systems and structures do you need to refine to better implement the instructional focus?

#### Potential Next Steps: Team activities and tools on the [Common Core Library](#)

- [School Reflection Protocol](#)
- [Instructional Focus Development Tool](#)



# P.S. 112 Jose Celso Barbosa



Kindergarten Student

*“We don’t have to raise our hands. We know that we have to listen when other students are talking.”*

## Student Ownership of Questioning and Discussion

**MISSION** The staff and administrators of our school believe that every student will be given the opportunity to maximize his/her ability to learn. We recognize that education is fostered through cooperation between the teacher, student, parent, and community. To this task we commit ourselves to build an educational atmosphere for learning which we will provide our students the opportunity to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially in order to become future productive members of society.

**VISION** We see our school as a community of learners where all members of the staff, students, and parents support and accept each other, and meet the needs of individuals. It is the hope that all members of our community will become lifelong learners, be flexible, embrace change and become active participants in our school and society. Ideally, all members of the community will be responsible and accountable. The members will respect themselves and others. The members will develop critical thinking skills and the ability to communicate effectively.

Founded	<b>1968</b>
Grades Served	<b>PK-2</b>
Borough, District	<b>Manhattan, 04</b>
Neighborhood	<b>East Harlem</b>
Total Students	<b>336</b>
Admissions Policy	<b>Limited Unscreened</b>
Co-located	<b>No</b>
Demographics	<b>Asian 3.0%</b> <b>Black 24.9%</b> <b>Hispanic 64.3%</b> <b>White 5.8%</b> <b>Other 1.9%</b>
Free or Reduced Price Lunch	<b>100%</b>
English Language Learners	<b>17.7%</b>
Special Education	<b>31.9%</b>
Attendance	<b>90.8%</b>

## ● Instructional Focus

P.S. 112 defines the instructional focus as a common goal that inspires school-wide collaboration, creates a common language, and directly impacts student performance and teacher practice. For 2013-14, the school identified student ownership of questioning and discussion as its instructional focus. The components of this focus are:

- Students take ownership of their questioning and discussion in the classroom by developing their own questions about topics and taking initiative in partner and whole-class discussions.
- Teachers cultivate student ownership through reflection and revision of their practice to best support students as they take ownership of questioning and discussion.
- School leaders hold high expectations that all students at P.S.112 achieve rigorous standards. Resources and supports for teachers to meet these expectations are provided.



*[Watch](#) students, teachers and the principal talk about the instructional focus at P.S. 112.*

## ● Decision-Making Process

The development of the instructional focus has been a multi-year project. Five years ago, P.S. 112 realized there was a need for a school-wide focus on vocabulary. This focus was identified after analyzing student discussions and written work. For the next two years, the inquiry teams monitored student performance on academic vocabulary, engaged in book studies, and adjusted classroom practice. This regular monitoring showed that the school had grown in its approach to developing academic vocabulary, and that they could now shift their primary focus to support deeper discussion in the classroom. Students were already speaking in their classrooms, and there was an opportunity to build on this practice and enable their discussions to go further. Monitoring of the impact of this focus, including looking at transcripts from various lessons, showed that students were participating more and asking questions, but teachers were driving the discussions. As a result, the staff refined its focus for 2013-14 to be on student ownership of questioning and discussion.

## ● Implementation and Monitoring

### Consistency Across the School

The consistency of the instructional focus and the shared understanding across the school can be seen in various ways:

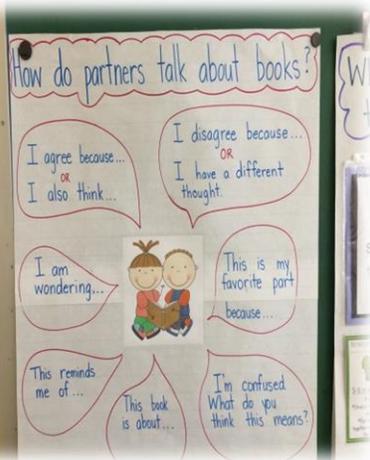
- 1) Shared expectation that each student has the ability to take ownership of his or her questioning and discussion;
- 2) Professional development support around questioning and discussion embedded in inquiry teams throughout the year;
- 3) Professional collaboration, including reflecting on student performance and teacher practice to monitor work around questioning and discussion; and,
- 4) Student discussions in the classroom and resulting work displayed throughout the school.

Every classroom shows a clear emphasis on questioning and discussion. Students are engaged in whole-class discussions and collaborative conversations with diverse partners, which support them in meeting the speaking and listening Common Core Standards for K-2. Around the school there are many visual supports around questioning and discussion. For example, when students are having discussions with their partners, they can use sentence starter posters as visual supports. Examples of the sentence starters are “I have a different thought” or “This is my favorite part because.” These visual supports help create the norm around discussion in the classroom. Another type of visual support that is seen in classrooms and hallways is a display of the students’ wonderings around a topic. The questions from the students help the teachers determine their plans for the unit based on students’ background knowledge and interest.

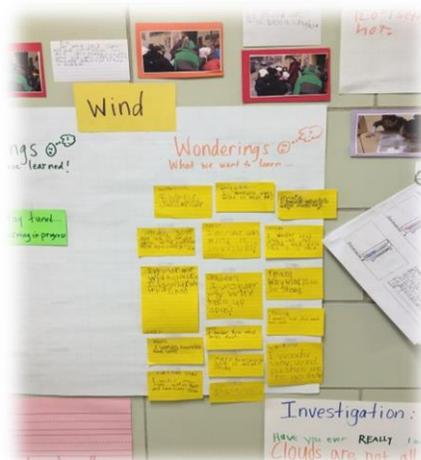


1<sup>st</sup> Grade Student

### Accountable Talk Rules for Discussion



### Student Wonderings About Discussion Topics



*“The [partner] chart helps me to think about the questions to ask my partner about his book.”*

### Collaborative Professional Learning – Study Groups and Inquiry Teams

At P.S. 112 there are various teams that meet, each with a specific focus to support students.

- 1) Inquiry teams are the grade level and vertical teams that meet weekly. Grade level teams look at student information and plan accordingly. In vertical team meetings, academic and social development interventions and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) student cases are discussed. Teachers of the various teams also attend professional development based on the surfaced needs. For example, teachers attend TCRWP Reading and Writing Summer Institutes. The expectation is that teachers turnkey information to their respective teams when they return to school in the fall.
- 2) Professional learning happens as a whole staff once a week. This year, the whole-staff professional learning was around the book, Quality Questioning, by Jackie Walsh and Beth Sattes. This book was chosen to support the work around the instructional focus. In this study group the staff engaged in discussion around the readings and considered implications on their practice.
- 3) Participation in before and after-school study groups is optional. The study groups meet by specific topic. There are vertical English language learner, Integrated Co-teaching (ICT), and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) NEST, Response to Intervention (RTI), math, Danielson and Danielson Domain 3b Quality Questioning and Discussion study groups. They review students' academic performance and personal behaviors as necessary and engage in a book study relevant to the targeted support area. Other sample study group books were Number Talks by Sherry Parrish and Lady Bugs, Tornadoes, Swirling Galaxy by Brad Buhrow.

Professional Collaboration Schedule				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Kindergarten Grade Level Team Meeting/Common Prep	ICT Study Group/Vertical Team/Before School	2 Grade Math Study Group/Before School	Asperger Syndrome Disorder Vertical Team Meeting/Before School	ELL Team Vertical team Common Prep
ELL Study group/After School	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Math Study Group/Before School	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Level Team Meeting/Common Prep	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade Common Prep/team Meeting	Kindergarten Math Study Group/before School
		RTI Study group/After School		Special Education Implementation Team meeting
		2 <sup>nd</sup> grade-RTI Study Group		
		1 <sup>st</sup> grade-Math Study Group		
		Whole School PD from 2:40-3:30 K-Quality Questioning and Discussion Study Group		

**Student and Teacher Reflections**

Students are often asked to reflect on their own progress in their questioning and discussion in the classroom. Students have goals that they set for their questioning and discussion, and have check-ins with their teachers on the progress towards these goals. Students assess their own progress on their discussion goals as well as on their written work with protocols from their teachers. This includes discussion in math, where students reflect on their strategies for solving problems.

Students have also reflected on their own discussions with partners with the use of video. Some teachers have taped a conversation between two students and then played it back to the pair of students. Together with the teacher, the partners watch the video and analyze their participation in the conversation. The partners identify the strengths and weaknesses in their discussions.



[Student Conversation Self-Assessment Template](#)

Teachers have increased their collaboration around their practice and own professional learning development. Some teachers choose to have a colleague come to their room to watch or video tape a lesson. Together, they review the lesson and provide feedback on areas of strength and development around questioning and discussion. Teachers say that having peers visit their classroom to help them reflect on their practice has been beneficial for their growth, and fosters a sense of collaboration within the community.

● **Impact**

**Student Performance**

As a result of students taking more ownership in questioning and discussion, there has been increased engagement in the classroom, an increase in student academic performance, and a positive impact on students’ social-emotional growth.

Student Engagement	Student Academic Performance	Student Social-emotional Growth
Increased participation in discussion	Growth towards meeting CCLS speaking and listening standards	Increased tolerance
More active listening	Growth towards meeting CCLS writing standards	Increased acceptance of individual differences of other students
Higher engagement in learning	Growth towards meeting CCLS reading standards	More frequent social interactions
Increased monitoring of own progress	Increase in content knowledge in science, social studies, technology and the arts	Increased responsibility to learning community



Teacher

*“The students were able to point out what they did well in the discussion and where they could improve in the next discussion. It was a great process for them to go through.”*

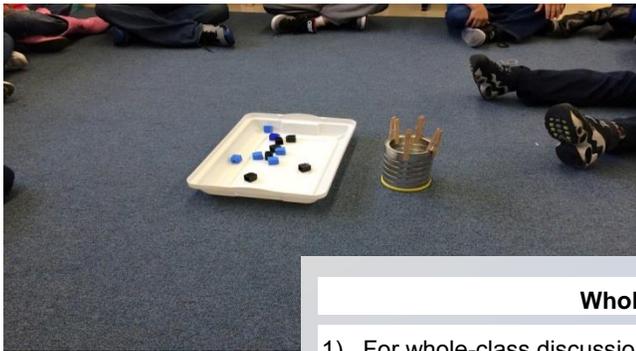
### Teacher Practice

The goal for students to take more ownership of their classrooms discussions has led teachers to take a more critical look at their pedagogical moves and how they are supporting this goal. For example, one teacher commented on how she had to manage her actions to hold students accountable in their conversations. She realized that she needed to increase her wait time in order to allow students the opportunity to drive the discussion. Teachers have also explored new practices to help support student ownership. See Spotlight Practice below.



#### Whole-class discussions provide opportunities for:

- Students to take ownership of their participation in discussion
- Norms to be established around group discussions



#### Whole-Class Discussion – How it Works

- 1) For whole-class discussions, students receive blocks for the classroom discussion. The number of blocks is based on their goals. For example, if a student is working on being a more active listener and not talking too much, that student would receive fewer blocks than a student who is working on participating more in discussions.
- 2) As students contribute to the conversation, they place their block in the box in the middle of the rug.
- 3) If during the conversation, a student notices another student is not focused, they take a clothespin from the container and loudly place it inside, indicating to the group that someone is not focused. The loud noise is a piece of accountability. Students know when they hear the noise that someone in the group needs to be more focused.
- 4) As teachers observe the student-led discussion, they note on their log sheet student participation, not only for quantity but quality as well.



[Speaking and Listening Checklist - Kindergarten](#)



[Student Conversation Checklist](#)

## ● Successes and Challenges

### Successes

The work around student ownership of questioning and discussion techniques supports the school in its mission to give every student the opportunity to maximize his or her ability to learn. The instructional focus has increased collaboration among the stakeholders at the school and has provided a shared vision for the educational atmosphere for learning at P.S. 112.

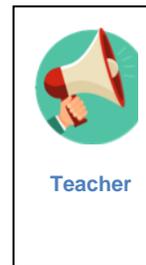
### Challenges

Teachers and administrators say that this work is difficult, and that it requires focus and refinement of practice, since it was not the way they personally were taught in school or trained to become teachers themselves. Teachers and staff at P.S. 112 continue to deepen their work around this practice.

Teachers and school leaders are determined to have the work around questioning and discussion continue when students are at home and in their communities. One way in which this challenge is being addressed is through inviting parents into the classrooms to have them experience their child's learning environment. For example, there are math days when parents can join their students during a math lesson. This allows parents to share the experience of their children and see how questioning and discussion is a part of the classroom. Continued efforts are being placed on how to support student learning outside of the classroom.

## ● Thinking Forward

The instructional focus for the 2014-15 school year has not been identified. Conversations will happen in June, as a result of analysis of student data and teacher reflections on the year, to identify the direction of the instructional focus for the upcoming year. Regardless of whether questioning and discussion is the common school-wide goal or focus, the school's work around questioning and discussion will continue to be deepened throughout the coming years.



*“Giving up ownership of the classroom is challenging and it takes practice, but is doable.”*