

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

The School in the Gardens

Elementary School 101

2 Russell Place

Queens

NY 11375

Principal: Valerie Capitulo-Saide

Dates of review: March 22 - 23, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School in the Gardens is an elementary school with 653 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 4% Black, 13% Hispanic, 47% White, and 33% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 95.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The new principal, along with the very good support of the assistant principal, has taken the school to new levels of success by assiduously maintaining students at the core of all data-driven goal setting. The accurate reflection, revealed in a pre-review of the school's self-evaluation, demonstrates a strong ability of the principal to plan strategically for continued school improvement using a wide range of data. In response to surveys, goals are much broader this year to improve communication with families. Parents appreciate the positive changes and the principal's "openness to listen". Several opportunities for collaboration result in strong relationships with staff and parents. However, long-term planning lacks a precise and refined interim assessment analysis by school leaders so that more timely adjustments may be made to leverage student progress.

Classrooms and high-quality team conversations exemplify the coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. All stakeholders find that the rigorous and adaptable curriculum offers a wide range of experiences and choices for students. Teachers proactively plan and carry out varied approaches to content, process, and product in response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs. Frequently students work in groups assessing their peer's work and holding each other accountable for results. This is supplemented by enrichment electives and extended-day activities that also lend themselves to differentiated instruction. Planned packets of activities by a special education teacher are shared with colleagues to target instruction in extended day. Nevertheless, some subgroups of students with special needs do not have equal access to this level of support and consequently do not make sufficient progress.

The principal prioritizes professional development and understands its importance in building a coherent school culture. Tactical organizational decisions result in programming that affords a complex structure of teacher teams that has an impact on curriculum, instruction, and assessment on grade level and across grades from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade. Vertical and teacher leader teams are the proven conduits that build adult capacity among the teams and individual teachers in advancing the work of inquiry that improves student outcomes. Teachers' written feedback to students so that students clearly and consistently understand how to measure the quality of their work and what they must do to improve lacks precision. In turn, school leaders do not yet manifest an expansive structure for regularly evaluating the effectiveness of teacher feedback on student work to accelerate learning.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principal has established strong staff relationships with multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate in setting interim and annual goals and discuss the progress of individuals and groups of students.
 - o Performance Series and Acuity assessments, reading responses, running records, pre- and post-assessments in math, and conferencing systems are widely used by all teachers. Following an extensive assessment analysis that uncovers the specific needs of their struggling learners, as well as higher achievers, the majority of teachers consistently collaborate to set grade-level and individual short-term and long-term goals precisely related to demonstrated student needs.
- Robust partnerships with academic organizations flourish to enhance the curriculum and engage students in taking ownership of their learning.
 - o Faculty engage in extensive professional development to implement the *How Full is Your Bucket? Respect For All Campaign*, tied to the school's literacy initiative that extends social-emotional support to all students. Working in tandem with: colleges, hospitals, and book stores, are just a few of the several good collaborations that complement the curriculum by providing students with opportunities for both academic and personal growth that accelerate their learning.
 - o Students are excited about participating in competitions in ballroom dancing, *Constitution Works*, and *First in Math* as well as extending their learning by supporting instruction beyond the classroom through the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, the Little Orchestra Society and New York Pops, and City Center Dance.
- The principal makes effective, data-driven organizational and instructional decisions that support the school's instructional goals resulting in students making consistent gains.
 - o School leaders creatively program three to four periods per week of common planning time, resulting in several team structures being put into place. These include grade-level teams, vertical, cross-graded teams, as well as a special education and core implementation teams, affording all teachers opportunities to regularly discuss data that identifies specific needs of targeted students and ways to advance their learning.
 - o The library has been reconfigured and has reopened as the school's media center with open access for students who can use the computers, borrow books to do research, or use the space as a study center to support their long-term plans for achieving instructional goals.
- Distributive leadership is fostered by several opportunities for all teachers to meet in collaborative teams and use data-informed processes to improve their teaching practices and increase student outcomes.

- o An extensive structure of cross-graded vertical teams and grade-level teams empowers teachers to engage in highly focused action research to meet the needs of their struggling learners. Teacher leaders meet regularly to discuss team norms and protocols, and progress of student and teacher work, and return to their respective teams to share what they have learned, ensuring the dissemination of key ideas and practices across the school.
- o Last year all inquiry teams focused on writing across the grades. Their reflective work resulted in the school-wide adoption of a narrative writing continuum implemented four times during the year as the benchmark assessment for on-demand writing.
- The school provides extensive school-wide and individual professional development and support for teachers, based on precise evaluation of classroom practice, that consistently improve teaching methods.
 - o Using the professional teaching standards, teachers engage in a self-assessment of their pedagogy resulting in the school-wide focus on assessing students. Professional development relevant to this focus is provided through the school's extensive team structure and outside network support during and after school, and on retreats.
 - o School leaders consistently evaluate the effectiveness of teacher competence through regular classroom visits, noting the next steps needed for each individual to elevate school-wide instructional practices. As a result, topics for professional development are identified and are differentiated for experienced and newer teachers to provide valuable and actionable support.
- All stakeholders work diligently to improve structures that expand home-to-school connections, establishing a more cohesive relationship with families.
 - o In response to the Learning Environment Survey, methods for increased communication with parents have resulted in parents seeing the new principal as a "partner" in supporting their children's education. They value opportunities that strengthen shared decision-making with the school. This results in communicating high expectations through monthly grade newsletters and weekly instructional and informational updates on the school's upgraded website linked to the parents' association website. Ongoing curriculum and instructional goals in all core subjects ensure that next learning steps for all students are met. Parents appreciate opportunities to visit classrooms and share their talents with the students and their ideas with the school.
- Students are highly motivated to learn through a rigorous and engaging curriculum that reinforces critical thinking skills and is aligned to State standards.
 - o Teams of teachers across the grades are catalysts for inquiry-driven curriculum development, ensuring alignment and coherence by vertically mapping what should be taught in each grade and eliminating overlap.
 - o Learning menus in social studies and group investigations in English language arts create classrooms that are lively with all students engaged

in activities, assignments, or group investigations that ensure higher-order skills and concepts are achieved.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance systems for monitoring and evaluating the ways in which benchmarks are used to measure progress towards all interim and long-term goals so that adjustments can be made in a timely manner.
 - o Benchmarking student progress is a widely implemented practice across classrooms. Individual teachers and teams assess student progress through running records, narrative writing continuum, unit-of-study assessments, performance series, rubrics, and homework. However, school leaders have not yet developed a precise system to aggregate the results of such assessments to determine progress toward school-wide interim goals so that adjustments can be made in curriculum and instruction for long-range impact on student performance.
- Establish structures to regularly evaluate and adjust ways in which teachers assess progress of targeted students by providing detailed feedback and clear next steps towards successfully achieving students' learning goals.
 - o Further analysis of students' work and conference notes reveals that a few teachers have not developed mastery in maximizing opportunities with students to isolate their granular and specific areas of need. Meaningful and detailed feedback tailored to each student that identifies specifically the next steps for improvement, especially for targeted groups of students, is not always present.
 - o Frequent use of graphic organizers and student checklists to organize thinking are widespread. Similarly, the use of rubrics to establish leveled criteria is implemented across the school. Nevertheless, not all students understand how rubrics tell them how good is good enough, since they are not explicitly taught how to consistently scrutinize their work against the appropriate rubric.
- Ensure multiple entry points to learning so that content, process, and student work products are further differentiated to match individual student's needs particularly those students requiring the most help and support.
 - o For the most part, instructional practice across classrooms supports differentiation through student choice and learning styles. Most students are fully challenged and engaged by work that is modified to accommodate their individual needs in the vast majority of heterogeneous classrooms. Similarly, tiered assignments ensured by project-based learning and enrichment electives, are offered by strategically tapping teacher talents. However, a class of struggling learners is not sufficiently challenged since varied approaches to content, process and product are not embedded and the special needs of this group are not being addressed well enough to ensure their adequate progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The School in the Gardens	△	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X			
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X			
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed