

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

Earth School

Elementary School 364

**600 East 6th Street
New York
NY 10009**

Principal: Alison Hazut

Dates of review: November 8-9, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Earth School is an elementary school with 333 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 13% Black, 37% Hispanic, 34% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 93.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Relationships across the school are deeply respectful, compassionate and supportive, so that students and adults feel confident sharing learning and interests.
 - A driving factor in school decisions is to know each student well. Therefore, staff members participate in powerful descriptive reviews of individual students and their work. Additionally, teachers write detailed narratives about each student twice a year in lieu of report cards. Last year, the school implemented a Support Team of teachers and guidance counselor that ensures struggling learners receive focused attention and interventions. This new approach has produced a noteworthy drop in referrals for special education testing. The school partners effectively with many outside agencies to support students' social-emotional growth. All major stakeholders—students, parents, and teachers—report in person and on the *School Survey* feeling safe, deeply respected, and positive.
- The principal makes informed and strategic organizational decisions that elevate coherence of practices.
 - Despite several years of reduced budgets, the school invests substantially in instructional coaching for teachers. It's significant that teacher retention rates exceed 90% over three years, as even new teachers choose to stay due to a supportive climate. This teacher stability, as well as the multi-grade approach to class formation, fosters instructional consistency and provides students with frequent opportunities to forge long-term connections with teachers.
 - The principal worked constructively with parents to move the extended day program from the afternoon to the early morning this year and to design alternating cycles of skill needs for struggling learners. As a result, nearly eighty students benefit from small group, targeted instruction at the start of their day and their attendance and punctuality have improved to date.
- Teachers engage students effectively in varied learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom with thoughtful attention to students' choices, which has led to students feeling relevance in their learning.
 - Student learning is celebrated through performances at weekly Town Halls and publishing parties. Teachers incorporate student choice and creative, experiential learning in a number of lessons, especially during core studies, "open work" time, and cluster classes. Hands-on experiences reinforce the school's stated mission of promoting learning through curriculum that is active, playful, socially conscious and academic.
 - Teachers extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom with monthly field trips, including a recent farm visit for third graders and local historical sites for upper grade students. Since most classroom instruction follows a workshop model approach, students spend much of their time working in small groups, pairs or independently and appear generally interested in their learning tasks.
- Teachers and staff benefit from strategic mentoring, collaborative professional development, and a shared philosophy about how students learn best.

- The entire faculty commits to two hours weekly of voluntary professional development in areas like writing, “open work” time, and sharing of best practices. This collective desire for more learning reflects and advances a strong culture of professional growth and pedagogical beliefs among teachers.
- The principal visits classrooms regularly and follows up with teachers consistently through conversations with probing questions and targeted suggestions and, less often, through written feedback. Teachers receive ample support from the coach, partner consultants, and team colleagues which elevates instructional practices and deepens collaboration. New teachers, in particular, benefit from meaningful instructional support and mentoring.
- School staff involve parents as full partners in key policy and program decisions which reinforces this vibrant, respectful community.
 - Parents pick up and drop off their child within each classroom—a symbolic, yet deliberate policy that maximizes parent and teacher accessibility and communication. Moreover, parents’ presence in the school abounds as they volunteer daily to assist teachers leading physical education activities, rotate responsibility for providing healthy snacks to classes, and help plan for a roof garden, among other tasks. Teachers update parents effectively via monthly newsletters and postings on the school’s website, and parents help decide school priorities at annual town meetings and organized school events. As a result, the cycle of dynamic parent advocacy and engagement persists as a defining feature of this school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen expectations of rigor and alignment to key standards across all curricula.
 - For the most part, staff consider curricular decisions with a keen eye towards State and now Common Core standards. Yet some school curricular decisions require closer alignment with known student needs. For instance, last year’s inquiry work at the school revealed students’ strength in writing lengthy expressive pieces, but weakness in mechanics, conventions and expository writing. However, when updating this year’s curriculum maps, several grade teams chose to start the year with extensive poetry and then personal narrative units in order to capture students’ early interest. This means that many teachers will not begin working with students on nonfiction reading or expository writing until later in the school year, despite this genre being identified as a leading literacy challenge for students.
 - School leader and staff recognize the need for increased academic rigor so that all students are challenged to their full potential. To that end, a consultant teacher works with an enrichment math group several days a week, while an inquiry team researches better ways to challenge high performing students. Across classrooms, however, there are not enough planned examples of academic tasks with critical thinking and problem solving components.
- Strengthen data collection by including summative assessments and core subject areas in order to meet more fully each student’s academic needs.

- Teachers do not engage sufficiently in item analysis of summative and periodic assessments, which means key data pieces of performance trends, constructed response items, and subgroup comparisons are sometimes overlooked. For example, fourth grade boys at the school consistently outperform girls by 15 to 18% in achieving level 4 in State science exams over three years, while African American students significantly underperform peers on State English language arts test. More work is needed to identify trends and subgroup needs in classes.
- Teachers and principal demonstrate a high level of expertise in capturing observational data, developing benchmark assessments in writing and math, and utilizing Teachers College literacy assessments. Furthermore, teachers routinely review students' class work as the basis for inquiry and other team planning. This attention to what students know and do results well in scaffolds and supports for struggling learners, but infrequently produces extensions, altered text or challenge tasks for higher achieving students. Consequently, this group of higher performing students displays uneven levels of engagement and interest in their learning.
- Ensure that whole school goal-setting practices link closely with student achievement data to leverage greater progress.
 - A hallmark of the school's goal-setting approach is input from parents, staff and students, which engenders strong "buy in" from all constituencies. However, the school does not sufficiently consider or analyze summative student performance data, which thereby limits purpose and effectiveness of goal-setting. The school's two major academic goals—use the Support Team to meet needs of struggling learners and look more closely at meeting needs of higher performing students—highlight important areas of need. Yet they lack specificity and measurable outcomes, so it is unclear what intended progress would look like.
- Monitor the consistency of teacher feedback on student work, especially on finished work products, to make clear to students their next learning steps.
 - There is a fair amount of work posted inside and outside classrooms and within folders. However, students receive insufficient written feedback on the quality of and next steps for their drafts and finished products. Increasingly, students reflect on completed work and share comments with peers, and in some cases, teachers provide a rubric evaluating written pieces. Some finished products undergo descriptive review process which informs student narrative reports. When this occurs, students gain considerable understanding of what they've done well and what remains a higher challenge level. Without routine feedback, teachers cannot consistently raise expectations for students' best work.
- Refine action planning by developing interim goals and benchmarks so that progress can be measured and success evaluated.
 - The school has collaborative processes for establishing priorities and goals and is beginning to develop systems for evaluating progress and extending into long-term planning. A good example is that all teachers revisit their students' prior year narrative goals as the baseline for goal-setting at November conferences so that individualized progress is assessed. However, other school-wide goals lack clear guideposts and benchmark expectation. For instance, this year's primary professional development focus on "open work" time has no set progress measures to inform or guide the school towards accelerated student learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Earth School	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, 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	

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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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				
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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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				
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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed