

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Mary Lindley Murray
Elementary School 116

210 EAST 33 STREET
MANHATTAN
NY 10016

Principal: JANE HSU

Dates of review: December 20- 21, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu Lughod

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Mary Lindley Murray is an elementary school with 783 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 10% Black, 18% Hispanic, 48% White, and 20% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 95.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students benefit from very rigorous and relevant curricula that emphasize high level thinking and speaking, resulting in high student outcomes. (1.1)
 - o Continuity in key staff enables the school to adapt its rich curricula to the expectations of the Common Core. Its focus on speaking and listening as key Core standards inform instructional decisions across all subject areas. The math staff developer, who served on a national team aligning the Investigations program to the new standards, introduced new units and modified others to enhance the school's focus on operations and fractions. This has resulted in a better alignment to the standards and addresses weaknesses identified through the item analysis of summative State test results.
 - o The Teachers' College curriculum provides coherence and rigor to literacy instruction and allows students to demonstrate exceptional skills in writing and includes targeted feedback that informs multiple drafts before publishing. Teachers effectively scaffold learning from unit to unit. In preparation for an upcoming opinion unit, students generated high-level questions about controversial choices and wrote nightly opinions on articles for a month. Debates help students revise their thinking based upon new information received, such as a grade 1 focus on farming and healthy lifestyles. Interdisciplinary connections are the norm and field trips expand entry points and enrich meaning. The value of the hands-on, investigative curricula is particularly notable in science, where 81% of students exceeded the standard last year.
- Strong pedagogy reflects the school's commitment to constructivist education, with differentiated strategies that build on student strengths to produce self-directed, reflective learners. (1.2)
 - o Teacher practice is reflective of the school's strong beliefs around student-centered learning. Differentiated tasks and strategies build on strengths, and foster independence and self-management. In math, student's problem solve independently, engage in tiered tasks, and use appropriate assistive devices, before working with partners or sharing solutions in small groups, thus meeting the challenges of learning and building perseverance. This approach has led to outcomes in math that exceed the very high district average, and benefits students in the integrated co-teaching classes, as evidenced by the additional credit for students with individualized education plans in last year's Progress Report. The investment in student talk and language rich environments benefits English language learners, whose passing rates of 60% on the State English language proficiency exam is four times the City average.
 - o The school's focus on the Common Core speaking and listening standards is evident in all classrooms as students use a wide array of devices to support their learning. Cubes to show how often students build on their partner's thoughts, prompt cards to extend discussion, and repeater cards to clarify knowledge, are steps taken towards internalizing this rigorous habit of mind. These literacy-based practices seamlessly support the math practice of critiquing the reasoning of others, and carry over into art, social studies, and physical education. Teachers pose high level, often-unanswerable questions that require students to defend their positions, and then deliver ownership of discussion to students who call on each other, and paraphrase before adding their thoughts. Student work products reveal significant cognitive effort, such as the contingency thinking

involved in producing interactive online stories and gallery walks where students “talk back” to peer comments.

- The leadership makes strategic organizational decisions that foster purposeful teacher collaboration to ensure rigor in classroom instruction. (1.3)
 - o The highly collaborative school community is wholly focused on promoting critical thinking skills to ensure student progress. Technology supports learning in forward-looking ways, lower-grade students produce videos for foreign pen pals, and upper-grade students create websites and use blogs to obtain teacher and peer feedback on written work products. Given budgetary constraints, teachers opted for document projectors to enhance literacy instruction instead of sharing Smart Boards. Teacher teams that meet formally at least twice a week, refine curriculum, lessons, tasks and assessments, and reflect on the effectiveness of their instructional strategies.
 - o In response to low progress, students in the school’s lowest third receive focused support during extended time. Additionally the intervention team now works with classroom teachers on small group strategies, thus improving teacher capacity to impact directly on student growth. Running records provide early indications that this strategy is generating improvements. Grade 4 teachers secured very high overall gains in both reading and math last year, a result partially attributed to five professional development sessions on conferencing. They looped with their students to build momentum in learning, and during this school year teachers new to grade 4 are receiving focused support in guided reading to further impact achievement.
- Teachers effectively align assessments to the focus goals in the curriculum and make adjustments at the classroom level that improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - o Teachers supplement their fine-grained analyses of item-level data from State tests and Acuity with scrutiny of daily writing and open-ended math questions, so they can “see how students are thinking.” In weekly meetings and on-line forums, teachers regularly share information and strategies. To address two trends observed in last year’s math results, the decline in level 4’s due to omission of explanations and the lower performing students’ challenges in explaining their thinking, teams are using mentor posters so that all students are clear about expectations for showing their work. Consequently, work samples reveal considerable improvement.
 - o Teachers make very intelligent use of benchmark assessments that align to standards, as well as conferencing notes, on demand writing, student jots, and ratings on specific rubric traits to design lessons, plan for small group instruction, and set individual goals. Results are used for both on-the-spot adjustments and with a view to building a repertoire of effective practices. The grade 1 team, which has matched specific strategies and next steps to the different levels of writing standard sub-indicators, enables staff to tailor daily assignments to the needs of different student groups and surface general issues. High quality conferring notes are used for making strategic pairings between peers, thus students help their partner work and think more carefully.
- Meaningful communication with parents empowers them to play active roles in supporting their children’s learning at home, thus contributing to students meeting the school’s high expectations. (2.4)

- o Parents, vital members of the community, describe the school as “a well organized ship, with 800 passengers.” Each classroom’s elected parent representative communicates information from the class, weekly meetings with school administrators, and monthly parent association meetings. Well-attended workshops co-planned with parents occur every other week, and ensure parents are well informed of the instructional approach and curricula. Parents also reinforce safety on the playground, successfully lobby local officials, and raise funds to hire substitutes so teachers can be involved in professional development activities.
- o Over time, the school’s policy has evolved to include formal report cards twice a year that are exemplary in that they include ratings against a comprehensive set of effort-based behaviors and standards-based content and skills. The principal’s review of all comments ensures clarity so that parents have an accurate understanding of their children’s strengths and next steps in both behavior and academics. Monthly progress reports and ongoing communication between parents and teachers through the homework folders further the reciprocal conversations that ensure each child’s needs are known and acted upon by school staff and parents.
- Professional development is a high priority, with teachers, coaches, and administrators demonstrating continuing growth through purposeful learning opportunities that ensure consistency in practice and leadership development. (4.3)
 - o The school devotes considerable resources to securing high caliber expertise to provide focused support for each teacher. Two full-time math staff developers work weekly with experienced teachers, and co-teach with new teachers, to develop content knowledge and pedagogy. A literacy coach and two expert consultants work with the teams in the integrated co-teaching classes and individual teachers to guide the expansion of repertoires in differentiation. Staff visit each other’s classrooms and lab sites, thus generating an expanding body of good practice across classrooms.
 - o Significant training for all staff on Common Core standards and the literacy program, in addition to individualized professional learning on- and off-site is successfully tracked. Teacher leadership is valued, and staff conduct professional development sessions in the school and at national conferences. New teachers play active roles, and some with strong facilitation skills serve as grade leaders while they hone their instructional skills.
- Common assessments enable teachers and leaders to track and communicate progress towards school goals and make timely adjustments to instructional plans to support improved student learning. (3.3)
 - o The school use of running records and customized Acuity assessments in reading and math enables it to set differentiated learning goals for each student. A strong data system tracks individual gains and how many students attained the target score of 85% correct. Teachers’ scoring of cross-grade student writing assignments ensures calibration of grading practices within the grade. Guidance from administrators and the instructional think tank promotes consistency in grading practices across grades, to ensure progress monitoring is reliable and informs adjustments in teacher assignments, student supports, as well as classroom decisions.
 - o Students write and reflect with considerable insight on their own goals in every subject. Teachers support these goals by providing specific next steps, and

connect academic goals to behavioral changes to support social-emotional maturity so students know what to change, how and why. As a result, students can point to specific strategies they use to improve. Goals are reported to parents on a monthly basis, with explicit recommendations for what to do at home, and parents return a copy with their own comments on their children's progress for a seamless focus on achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Accelerate the pace of observation cycles to ensure optimal growth for teachers at every level and intensify supports in exceptional cases. (4.1)
 - o The school sets high standards for teaching that teachers strive to meet, devoting time well above their professional responsibilities to improve their craft. In addition to the school wide goal based on Danielson's questioning and discussion competency, each teacher has a rubric-based additional goal, well supported through a personalized plan. While these criteria were used for observing the 18 probationary teachers in the first trimester, other teachers did not receive feedback from observation cycles to further refine their practice. Additionally, school leaders did not fully incorporate transparent evaluation criteria, thus minimizing full disclosure regarding tenure decisions.
- Build metrics to measure the impact of process-oriented standards and ensure their incorporation into the existing exemplary data systems to fully align assessment practices across the school. (5.2)
 - o The school has strong structures for evaluating assessment practices, with knowledgeable administrators meeting frequently with staff developers, consultants, and grade leaders, to ascertain how well the instructional goals and focus standards are being achieved. While all teacher teams are implementing practices that address the Common Core standards, there are no outside models to draw upon, and the school has not yet developed precise metrics for measuring progress on the math practices and the speaking standards, thus missing opportunities to draw out the explicit connection between standards and student outcomes.
 - o Many teacher teams have developed exemplary ways of aggregating and organizing data matched to rubrics that are aligned to the Common Core, skillfully using electronic spreadsheets enabling them to conduct ongoing, fine-grained analyses and evaluations. However, this best practice has not extended to all teacher teams, thus the school lacks an important tool for assuring that all teachers are aware of and accountable for outcomes in a coherent fashion.
- Enhance the alignment in annual planning processes by improving cross-grade communication to strengthen the long-term impact of organizational decisions. (5.3)
 - o The school engages in comprehensive needs assessments that inform goals that faculty embrace and that impact practice. However, the school does not engage in strategic, multi-year planning to enable it to anticipate how yearlong decisions will impact outcomes in subsequent years. Although a decision around a cluster-teacher assignment allows for classroom teachers to focus on reading and math, there is no structure for interdisciplinary planning. Similarly, structures for regular communication between the new fourth grade team and the looped fifth grade team are not yet evident. Thus, there are hindrances to ensuring successes around new initiatives.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Mary Lindley Murray	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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				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, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?				X
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?				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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				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, guidance/advisement 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, with particular attention to the CCLS?				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
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