

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

P.S. 137 John L. Bernstein  
Elementary school M137

293 EAST BROADWAY  
MANHATTAN  
NY 10002

Principal: MELISSA RODRIGUEZ

Dates of review: December 13, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

P.S. 137 John L. Bernstein is an Elementary school with 231 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 23% Black, 54% Hispanic, 1% White, 14% Asian students and 7% other students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.9%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders make exceptional use of a broad range of student achievement data that results in a clear understanding of school trends and next steps. (2.1)
  - o The administrative team of principal and assistant principal assemble and analyze a full range of student information. They balance qualitative data from regular review of student work and detailed narratives three times a year, as well as quantitative data from State, periodic, and classroom assessments. This close attention to student data leads to a deep understanding of school strengths and needs, which then produces clear goals for school improvement. For example, a major concern is that 53% of students in kindergarten through grade 2 have not met reading level benchmarks. To address this need, school leaders supplement reading instruction with a talented, part-time reading teacher and small groups of guided reading during extended day program.
  - o School leaders track safety and discipline incidents methodically and note that a handful of students in past years escalated misbehaviors which adversely impacted school culture. This year, teachers across the school have embraced a values-based Book of the Month club where characters face personal dilemmas and resolve conflicts peacefully. Through read-alouds and intensive guidance work in classrooms, students and staff speak more openly and collectively about protecting a positive school environment. Disciplinary incidents are now down to one-third the incidents of last year and involve less physical aggression, which has improved tone in classrooms and hallways.
- School leaders hold high expectations for teacher performance and provide explicit feedback that reinforces consistency of teaching practices. (4.1)
  - o Administrators prioritize routinely being in classrooms and providing constructive feedback to improve instruction. To date, school leaders have conducted nearly 150 formal and informal observations in three months and they base their observational feedback on a common framework for expectations. Teachers value the feedback and support they receive and note improvements in teaching strategies as a result, especially think alouds and modeling. Since they monitor instruction closely, school leaders make informed tenure and professional development decisions that raise the bar higher for quality of instruction across classrooms.
- Staff make sensible and strategic organizational and instructional decisions that improve alignment between goals and practices. (1.3)
  - o This year, the school has had early engagement discussions with the school community about potential serious interventions by the City or State. Despite this ominous backdrop, school leaders and staff have focused squarely on "doing more and better" with current resources. For example, a grant supports hands-on training for teachers, paraprofessionals and school aides about de-escalating student conflicts. Additionally, the school has included parents along with faculty in attending monthly literacy workshops at Teachers College. These efforts broaden the impact of professional development to a variety of constituents, which strengthens the larger school community and instructional capacity, as evidenced by meaningful student work products.

- o This year staff voted to create six extended sessions for professional development with planning vertical alignment as a key focus. In addition, teacher teams meet weekly and then share-out monthly together about differentiation strategies. As a result of these increased structures for professional collaboration, teachers have more opportunities to share resources, to modify instructional plans and challenge students as evidenced by instructional tasks and artifacts.
- Teachers assess student learning thoughtfully and intentionally, which leads to meaningful instructional planning and interventions for students. (2.2)
  - o A school-wide initiative has been the development of rubrics that are customized to each unit of study in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, teachers have developed rubrics for solving a math problem of the week, writing an argumentative essay or persuasive letter, and reading informational text. This focus on creating specific rubrics has provided teachers and students with meaningful information about learning and progress. Teachers also rely on a range of other assessments, such as tests and periodic assessments, to gauge students' and subgroups' performance, yet it is the rubric development that has shifted teachers' practice of evaluating deeply student work and process.
- Teachers track student goals and progress productively so that students and families know clearly what next steps will occur and why. (3.3)
  - o Teachers organize student data to monitor student progress towards school-wide goals and individual targets. In English language arts, there is a goal of increasing students' scores on extended response writing to 2.35, while in math, there is a goal of answering correctly 65% of questions involving fractions, decimals and percentages. Through comprehensive rubrics, tools for tallying on-demand writing responses and trackers to organize periodic assessment results, teachers keep careful watch over students' progress towards the goals. Additionally, teachers provide regular feedback to students and families about key next steps for mastering learning goals. Conferring is much improved as an area of productive teacher feedback to students. As a result, students and families benefit from clear information from teachers about goals and next learning steps.
- Staff consider carefully how they evaluate students' learning, which leads to common approaches across grades. (5.2)
  - o Teachers and school leaders acknowledge that student writing has been an area of weakness on State tests. To address this need, staff implemented performance tasks aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and developed assessments to monitor students' progress. For instance, all students in lower elementary grades complete one on-demand writing assessment and students in upper grades complete two on-demand assessments after every six-week cycle. This structure for evaluating students' writing promotes more frequent writing practice and more explicit teacher instruction, including exemplars for each writing unit. Parents also receive improved feedback about writing in the narrative reports, as well as in a new format of parent-teacher conferences in which upper grade students showcase final work pieces. As a result, students and parents speak knowledgeably about specific writing goals and next steps for improvement.

## What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop curricula that engage and challenge students in order to promote students as independent learners and critical thinkers. (1.1)
  - Updated curriculum maps are in place but lack focused attention on promoting deeper thinking. Across many classrooms, there is insufficient evidence of altering texts, assignments and tasks to challenge students at all levels. A notable exception was a fourth grade lesson where students problem solved a rigorous, real world and multi-step math investigation, including challenge questions as extensions, about beverages that fit into vending machines. In this and several other lessons, all students were challenged to think critically, defend assertions, and explain solutions in multiple ways. Without consistent, challenging curricula school-wide there are limited opportunities to ensure higher order thinking and learning in all classes.
- Cultivate a more positive learning environment for students and adults through support systems of consistent practices and open dialogue. (1.4)
  - The Student Council is a recent positive initiative for improving school culture and expanding opportunities for student voice in the school. Also, the School Leadership Team has become increasingly effective. However, there are a number of stakeholders who seek more attention to students' social-emotional learning and more open dialogue. Teachers express that different leadership styles of principal and assistant principal at times send mixed messages. Students and parents note that there are limited opportunities for older and younger students to work together, such as reading together as buddies, or practice physical fitness. The lack of consistent and pervasive programs to engender trust and positive attitude within the school community, students' academic and personal growth are hindered.
- Develop further the school's approach to evaluating its own curricular, instructional and organizational decisions to maximize coherence. (5.1)
  - This year the school supplemented the Every Day Math curriculum with a different approach and program, known as Contexts for Learning, in grades 2 and 4. Additionally, all classes solve a multi-step math problem of the week. Some teachers express privately that they find this increased focus and willingness to pilot new programs useful in meeting the needs of different kinds of learners. Other teachers state that implementing two different math programs is confusing and that the extended day offers insufficient small groups in math. Due to insufficient opportunities to review and discuss in depth current instructional programs, the evaluation and monitoring of instructional decisions lacks clear feedback and direction and is, thereby, weakened.
- Deepen what is already effective teaching across classes with particular attention to higher performing students so that all students' needs are met. (1.2)
  - Students appear motivated and sufficiently engaged in class as they learn individually, within small groups, and in whole class settings. There is good attention to multiple learning styles, as teachers vary instruction for visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences. Teachers differentiate across classrooms, especially in varying questions, using scaffolds, and planning for multiple learning

styles. For example, students in a kindergarten class engaged actively in making pattern books while the teacher shared a mentor text, then worked closely with a small group and provided other students with a hand-shaped graphic organizer. However, there is a lack of altered assignments or extensions for higher performing students, hindering opportunities to consistently challenge all learners.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: P.S. 137 John L. Bernstein	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<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		
<b>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.</b>				
<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	
<b>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.</b>				
<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	
1..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**

<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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