

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**P.S. 140 Nathan Straus  
K-8 school M140**

**123 RIDGE STREET  
MANHATTAN  
NY 10002**

**Principal: ESTEBAN BARRIENTOS**

**Dates of review: February 14-15, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

P.S. 140 Nathan Straus is a K-8 school with 400 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 14% Black, 75% Hispanic, 2% White, 4% Asian students and 6% other students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 22% 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 91.5%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders have developed meaningful and strategic approaches to observing classroom teaching that have provided explicit expectations for practice. (4.1)
  - o School leaders recognize that nearly half of all teachers have been dissatisfied with prior observational feedback and have committed to an ambitious agenda of short, frequent cycles of class visits, seven school-wide walkthroughs as well as follow up. To date, all teachers have had at least two informal observations with written feedback using a checklist that notes evidence of learning environment and academic performance. Early indications of this observational approach are positive that feedback is rooted in the research-based rubric of Charlotte Danielson and effective in improving teaching practices. School leaders make constructive, specific comments in their feedback, noting strong and improved practices and providing clear next steps. As a result, teachers understand common instructional expectations, while administrators utilize the weekly professional development committee meetings to support teachers' growth.
- Teachers at this school assess student learning wisely which leads to improved instructional planning and interventions for students. (2.2)
  - o There is consistency to the kinds of student data that all classroom teachers gather and review, including running records, State test results, Acuity data, I-station logs, math unit assessments, and on-demand tasks. Faculty routinely analyze student assessment data for purposes of lesson and unit planning, as well as for meaningful conferencing with students and parents. Beyond these purposes, some teachers showcase student data to motivate increased productivity. For instance, several teachers track class reading stamina on a chart where students see growth, such as from 18 to 26 minutes of continuous reading over the course of a month. Additionally, some teachers design thoughtful rubrics for specific units of study so that students clearly know expectations for achieving standards and mastery. Not all teachers have developed rubrics or have tracked assessments to this degree, but most have solid practices of purposeful data collection.
- School leaders and staff make highly informed organizational decisions that align well with instructional priorities and promote students' academic growth. (1.3)
  - o This year the school was identified as in need of "Corrective Action" for missing State targets in literacy. To address lagging

student achievement in literacy, school leaders invested significant resources to train teachers and paraprofessionals in targeted literacy interventions, such as Great Leaps, Foundations, Wilson, I-stations and the 100 Book Challenge. This focused attention has led to improved tracking of students' interim progress with varied reading, writing, and comprehension assessments, as well as more effective guided group work during lessons.

- o School leaders seized the opportunity of several teacher vacancies projected for 2011 - 12 by hiring a group of very skilled and collaborative teachers. These new teachers have infused the staff with enthusiasm for teaching and commitment to school improvement. In particular, two new early elementary grade teachers model positive classroom environments, strong routines, and levels of questioning. As a result, the already-strong teaching practices in early elementary years have been elevated further.
- There is strong investment and accountability in teacher teams so that professional collaboration and serving student needs are always the foci. (4.2)
  - o Despite scheduling challenges for a grades K - 8 school, administrators commit to providing teachers adequate time and support to meet with colleagues in a productive manner. Therefore, all teachers engage actively in weekly professional development and at least weekly team meetings. The team leader positions rotate monthly among teachers, which augments facilitation and leadership skills of faculty and deepens their investment in team work. For example, teacher teams function with improved consistency compared to prior years in their use of protocols for examining student work and their sharing of instructional resources. Recently, the second grade teachers collaborated in revising the "All About Book" unit of study to emphasize author voice and use of formal and informal language. Teachers and school leaders alike highlight the promising inquiry-based work of teacher teams as an important lever for school improvement.
- Teachers and school leaders have established effective systems for self-evaluation, review and modification of practice to accelerate student achievement. (5.1)
  - For years this school has had solid daily operations in place, including attendance, discipline and compliance procedures, yet its experience with instructional change has been slower. Now there are more flexible structures for monitoring trends in student performance, including strong teacher teams, improved data gathering and network expertise. This year's adoption of the 100 Book Challenge for middle school students and TERC math investigation for elementary school students resulted from a series of teacher-initiated discussions, review of different curricula, and study of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Additionally,

teacher teams have raised the bar of their work output with more agile practices of analyzing student work and deeper insights about instructional planning. The school's current approach to school improvement ensures that key stakeholders evaluate and adjust decisions based on student progress.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Continue to develop curricula that challenge students to think critically and problem solve creatively so that all students are prepared for high school and beyond. (1.1)
  - o The school has made good progress in organizing and developing curriculum maps this past year that begin to incorporate performance tasks across content areas. Moreover, dynamic teacher teams work to align curricula to the CCLS. However, tasks assigned in many class lessons vary widely with too few examples of challenging and rigorous work. For example, students in a self-contained special education class copy words that end with "ck" into their word work journal while fourth grade students complete a math division problem of apples into boxes with no scaffolds or extensions to stretch students' thinking and learning. These low-level tasks are offset by powerful examples of critical thinking, like a fifth grade math lesson where students pose questions to find and explain equivalent fractions and a sixth grade self-contained special education class where students find text-based examples about how war affects a character's behavior. This inconsistency of tasks across classrooms produces unequal expectations for thinking and learning by all students.
- Strengthen current teaching practices of differentiation with questioning and routines that extend students' higher order thinking skills to promote rigor. (1.2)
  - o In at least half of classrooms, student tasks and activities are differentiated so that different questions, supports and challenges match student needs. For example, sixth graders in a social studies class work collaboratively on an ancient Egypt jigsaw activity with effective scaffolds and extensions as needed. Similarly, third grade students work as pairs to identify and extend number patterns, as two teachers support some students with manipulatives and prompt other students to formulate an equation. Most teachers use data wisely in their planning, so there are increasing examples of guided coaching in small groups and improved conferencing between teachers and students. While many students engage actively in their learning, others note in person and in the School Survey that they hear teachers yelling at students, which then distracts and inhibits their participation. This then leads to uneven levels of student thinking and engagement in learning.

- Extend systems for evaluating assessment practices and communicating updated performance data to families to make clear students' next learning steps. (5.2)
  - o Staff credit the I-station literacy intervention and the 100 Book Challenge as powerful examples of high engagement by students, as well as immediate tracking and sharing of performance with teachers and families. Therefore, school leaders hope next year to expand the I-station resource to math and the 100 Book Challenge to earlier grades. The efficiency of these two intervention programs contrasts with weaker structures at the school for monitoring assessment of student learning. For instance, there is no school-wide system yet in place to track progress of student writing as measured by rubric scores from on-demand and performance tasks. Teacher teams are developing ways to capture this learning. However, staff do not know precisely the extent of students' writing improvement or remaining areas of need, which then limits teacher planning and delivery of writing instruction.
- Refine current grading policies and ways of organizing students' academic data to capture trends in student performance more fully. (2.3)
  - o There is an annual assembly in which grading is discussed, but not in detail nor with clear rationales. Many students seem unaware of grading policies at the school and little is posted in classrooms or written into syllabi about grading standards. This ambiguity of grading policies has led to overall grade inflation, with middle school passing rates at this school averaging at least ten percentage points higher across major subjects compared with city-wide grading patterns. Some parents seek greater information from the school about their child's academic performance. Staff had intended last year to pilot an electronic grade book for middle school students, but this initiative has not yet been implemented. Instead, there are more frequent interim progress reports that go home, but the information captured is somewhat limited, which reduces its usefulness to school staff and families.
- Deepen the school's approach to setting benchmarks and reviewing interim progress so that school improvement is monitored closely. (5.3)
  - School leaders have selected supplementary instructional programs, such as I-station and 100 Book Challenge, with built-in benchmarks, to monitor students' progress efficiently and regularly. However, the school's internal systems for measuring interim growth are not sufficiently developed. For instance, students with disabilities are the largest subgroup at the school and several action plan steps in the Comprehensive Education Plan aim to improve their academic achievement. There is limited

known information about the extent that students shift to less restrictive settings as a guidepost for assessing their progress. Staff work productively with students with disabilities, yet the lack of more structures and interim goals to evaluate their learning progress limits opportunities for student improvement.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: P.S. 140 Nathan Straus	UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		<b>X</b>		
<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?		<b>X</b>		
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?		<b>X</b>		
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			<b>X</b>	
<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			<b>X</b>	

<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<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>